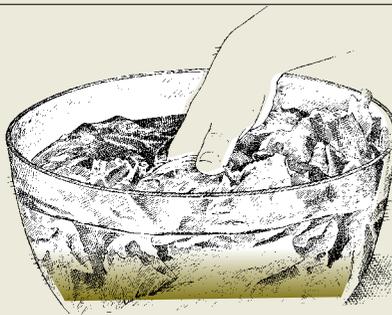


Leafy Salads 101

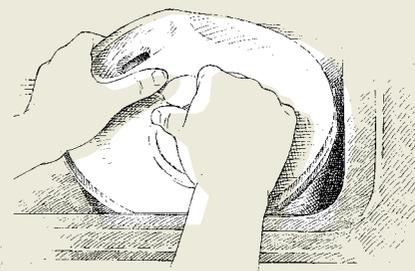
Constructing the perfect salad is trickier than it seems. From battered greens to acidic vinaigrettes, simple salads can suffer from a variety of ills. Here's how to produce good salads every time. BY MATTHEW CARD

CLEANING GREENS

The first step in making any salad is cleaning the greens. (Unwashed greens should be carefully stowed away in the crisper and the rubber band or twist tie removed, as the constriction encourages rotting.) Nothing ruins a salad faster than gritty leaves. Our favorite way to wash small amounts of lettuce is in the bowl of a salad spinner; larger amounts require a sink. Make sure there is ample room to swish the leaves about and rid them of sand and dirt. The dirt will sink to the bottom. Exceptionally dirty greens (spinach and arugula often fall into this category) may take at least two changes of water. Do not run water directly from the faucet onto the greens as the force of the water can bruise them. When you are satisfied that the leaves are grit-free, spin them dry in a salad spinner. Greens must be quite dry, otherwise the vinaigrette will slide off and taste diluted.

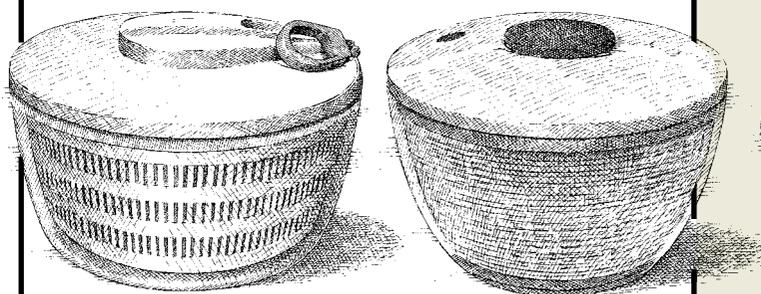


1. Using your hands, gently move the greens about underwater to loosen grit, which should fall to the bottom of the salad spinner bowl.



2. If you own a crank-style salad spinner, place it in the corner of your sink. This increases your leverage by pushing the spinner down to the sink floor and into the sink walls, thereby stabilizing it.

BEST SALAD SPINNERS



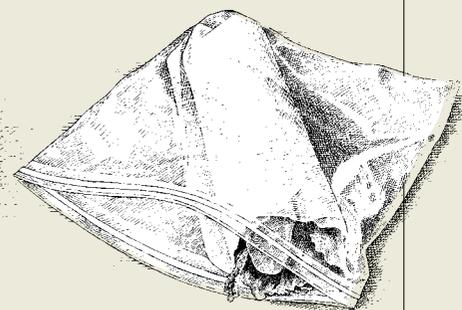
ZYLISS

OXO

When we tested eight salad spinners (September/October 1999), we had a two-way tie between spinners made by Zyliss and Oxo Good Grips. They both excelled at drying greens, though they had minor trade-offs: The Zyliss finished the task nominally faster, but the Oxo had a more ergonomic handle and a nonskid bottom, a big bonus. The design enhancements lifted the Oxo's price to \$26, \$5 more than the Zyliss.



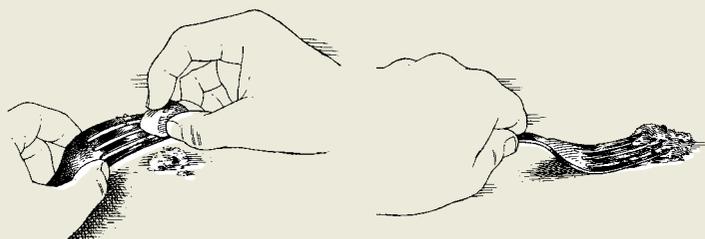
3. Line the empty salad spinner with paper towels, then layer in the greens, covering each layer with additional towels. In this manner, the greens will keep for at least two days.



4. For longer-term storage—up to a week—loosely roll the greens in a kitchen towel or paper towels and then place the rolled greens inside a large zipper-lock bag and seal it.

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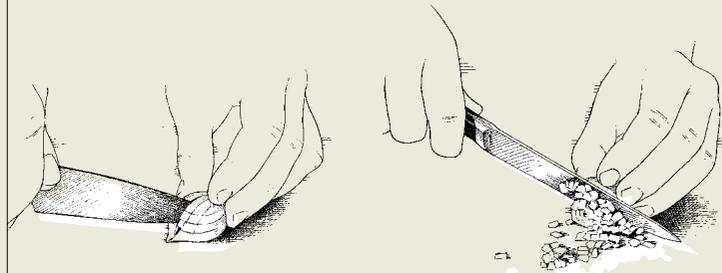
PUREEING GARLIC FOR VINAIGRETTE



1. Hold a fork with its tines resting face-down on a cutting board. Rub a peeled clove of garlic rapidly back and forth against the tines, close to their points.

2. Once the clove has been forced through the tines, turn the fork over and mash any large chunks to make a smooth puree.

MINCING A SHALLOT FOR VINAIGRETTE



1. Place the peeled bulb flat-side down and make several slices parallel to the work surface, almost to (but not through) the root end. Then make a number of very closely spaced parallel cuts through the top of the shallot down to the work surface.

2. Finish the mincing by making very thin slices perpendicular to the lengthwise cuts.

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN BURGONNE

MATCHING GREENS AND DRESSING

Most salad greens fall into one of three categories: mellow, spicy, or bitter. The following salads are representational pairings of each type of green and a vinaigrette that best matches its particular flavors. Feel free to mix and match greens from each category to change the flavor, color, and texture of each salad.

The vinaigrette recipes yield $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dressing, or enough to dress 4 quarts of greens, about eight servings. When making smaller amounts of salad, figure on 2 tablespoons of dressing per quart of greens.

Whole fresh herb leaves, like parsley, basil, thyme, oregano, marjoram, and chervil, may also be added to any of these salads for a burst of flavor.

SALAD OF MELLOW GREENS WITH RED WINE VINAIGRETTE SERVES 8

➤ Mellow-flavored greens are the most common greens at the market and include lettuces such as Boston, bibb, red and green leaf, red oak, lolla rossa, and iceberg, as well as flat-leaf spinach. Their mild flavors are easily overpowered and are best complemented by a simple dressing, such as a classic red wine vinaigrette.

- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons red wine vinegar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 4 quarts washed and dried mellow greens

Combine all dressing ingredients in jar, seal lid, and shake vigorously until emulsified, about 20 seconds. Dress greens (see right).

SALAD OF SPICY GREENS WITH MUSTARD AND BALSAMIC VINAIGRETTE SERVES 8

➤ Spicy greens include arugula, watercress, mizuna, and baby mustard. They easily stand up to strong flavors such as the mustard, shallots, and balsamic vinegar in this dressing.

- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon finely minced shallot (see illustrations on page 16)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 4 quarts washed and dried spicy greens

Combine all dressing ingredients in jar, seal lid, and shake vigorously until emulsified, about 20 seconds. Dress greens (see right).

SALAD OF BITTER GREENS WITH CREAMY GARLIC VINAIGRETTE SERVES 8

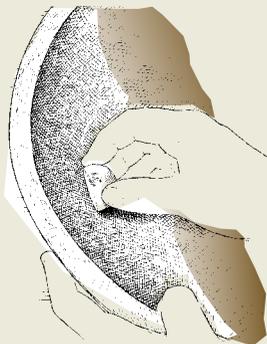
➤ Escarole, chicory, Belgian endive, radicchio, frisée, and young dandelion greens all fall into this category. A creamy, assertive vinaigrette tempers the astringency of the greens.

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons sour cream or yogurt
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon juice from 1 lemon
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 small garlic clove, pureed (see illustration on page 16)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- Ground black pepper to taste
- 4 quarts washed and dried bitter greens

Combine all dressing ingredients in jar, seal lid, and shake vigorously until emulsified, about 20 seconds. Dress greens (see right).

TOSSING GREENS AND DRESSING

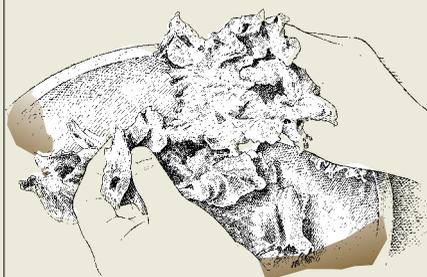
We found that an ideal salad bowl is wide-mouthed and relatively shallow, so that the greens become evenly coated with vinaigrette quickly. A wide bowl also facilitates gentle handling of the greens. The bowl should be roughly 50 percent larger than the amount of greens to make sure there is adequate room for tossing. For example, a salad with 4 quarts of greens should be tossed in a 6-quart bowl. Whatever utensils you choose to toss the salad—wooden spoons, hands (our favorite method), or tongs—a light touch is crucial. A roughly tossed salad will wilt much faster than a lightly tossed salad.



1. Add mild garlic flavor: Peel and cut a clove of garlic. With the cut-side down, rub the interior of your salad bowl.



2. Measure greens: Loosely pack the greens into a large measuring cup, figuring on 2 cups per serving.



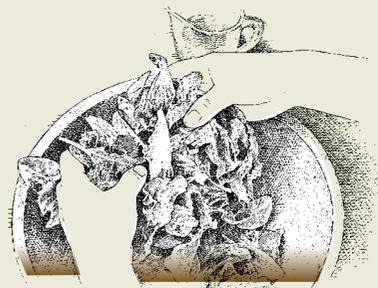
3. Tear greens: If the greens are too large, gently tear them into manageable pieces with your hands just before serving the salad. If torn ahead of time, they will discolor and wilt.



4. Shake dressing: Just before adding the dressing, give it a quick shake to make sure that it is fully combined and that the solid ingredients, like shallots, are evenly dis-



5. Drizzle dressing: To prevent overdressed greens, add the dressing in small increments as you toss the salad.



6. Toss salad: Coat the greens by gently “fluffing” them, adding more vinaigrette only when certain the greens need it.

CHOOSING VINEGAR AND OIL

All vinegars are not created equal. Some, like red and white wine vinegars, have a searingly high acidity of 5 to 7 percent. Lemon juice, in comparison, is milder, about 4 percent. And depending on its age and quality, balsamic vinegar's acidity can vary a good deal (the cheap stuff being nothing more than caramel-colored red wine vinegar). We adjust the ratio of oil to vinegar to suit the vinegar's strength; the oil mellows the acidity. For example, a red wine-based vinaigrette requires 4 parts oil to 1 part vinegar, but a vinaigrette made with lemon juice requires just 3 parts oil to one part juice. Extra-virgin olive oil is our top choice for salads because it tastes good with all greens and vinegars.