



H FETA  
LADS  
(5 Salads)  
(3 Salads)  
Our smallest plate



# Leaf lessons

Our heritage food contributor, Karen Dudley of Woodstock's The Kitchen, argues the case for well-dressed greens.

It's all very well for me, the self-declared Salad Queen, to be snooty about the green salad (notice the singular) of my youth. You know the one – the ubiquitous iceberg lettuce with cucumber and tomato and a little blanched onion (if you were lucky).

Over time, the green salad has seen a number of upgrades: crumbly (crummy) feta, bits of fruit (pineapple, apple, orange), raw peppers and sprouts (not my favourite), croutons (phew!), olives and even red onion.

The truth is: this South African 'green salad' has served us well. Every braai or supper party had to have one to complete the meal. But I put it to you: there was a sense that this kind of salad was obligatory, a component to be endured, a nod to vitamins.

We've not talked much about this leafy salad, much in the same way as we do not talk about the pain of wearing high heels: we consider them an unquestioned necessity, serving a certain purpose. The potato salads and pasta salads would be tucked into with gusto, but any leaves on a plate would be limply pushed around.

It is not for lack of trying. Growing up, we had a marvellous wooden salad bowl which my mom taught me to rub with garlic and olive oil. And we made some beautiful salads in it.

Am I right in saying that South Africans like lots of bits in our leafy salads? I think because in some way, we feel the need to compensate with too much stuff, the poor delicate leaves becoming burdened by a weight of toppings.

It doesn't have to be this way! The leaves themselves – buttery or peppery, tender or crunchy – add an element all their own to a meal. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with the classic South African tossed salad, but I like

to eat all my leafy salad components separately and untossed (!). I am also a proponent of the well-dressed leaf.

I have taken leaf lessons from a few of my friends over the years – a leaf out of their salad bowls as it were. Luli, arguably one of my most fashionable and stylish friends in London, once made me a salad of iceberg lettuce lightly dressed with some very fine olive oil and aged balsamic vinegar, Maldon sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, all tossed together. This is still one of my personal favourites. I can eat the whole bowl! Ordinary, unfashionable iceberg elevated to something sublime and irresistible.

And my friend Rhian, a passionate environmentalist living on the Garden Route with an indigenous forest for a back yard, does something wonderful with baby spinach leaves (organic, of course). She tosses the tender leaves with flaxseed oil and Maldon salt and they are transformed into something so pure and delicious you can almost feel your skin glow.

Eliza, now a doctor of theology and mother of four, used to help me out when I first started cooking for people. We would bond over Caesar salad. Still today, just a mention of this salad will set our eyes sparkling with our shared passion for a good cos lettuce coated with lemony anchovy dressing and Parmesan!

There is such a vast palette of ingredients to play with when it comes to salad – the goal should always be to let each ingredient shine!

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## Karen's salad leaf tips

- Wash and spin! Let sandy leaves soak in a deep bowl or sink of water to rid them of grit. Invest in a salad spinner; in my experience, the cheaper ones work the best.
- Develop your own personal vinaigrette; you can shake it up in a jar and tweak it to your taste.
- Leaves should be treated with the utmost delicacy: think the coolness of your fingertips, rather than a rough hand.
- When assembling a leafy salad, tuck bits in here and there, rather than flattening your leaves with toppings.

heritagefood

Sesame  
miso  
dressing

## Sesame miso dressing

- 1 red chilli, finely chopped
  - 60ml vegetable oil • 37ml lime juice • 30ml miso paste • 15ml soy sauce • 15ml rice vinegar
  - 5ml sesame oil • 5ml toasted sesame seeds • 5ml grated ginger
- Whisk all the ingredients together in a bowl (or shake it up in a jar).

## Zingy dressing

- 60ml finely diced red onions
- 60ml chopped gherkins
- 30ml capers • 15ml Dijon mustard • 5ml Worcester Sauce
- 60ml chopped Italian parsley
- 150ml olive oil • 15ml lemon juice • 5 drops Tabasco • freshly ground black pepper to taste

Put all the ingredients in a food processor and blitz until a coarse pesto dressing is formed.

Zingy dressing

## Baba ganoush

- Arrange 5 whole brinjals directly over the gas burner of your hob. If you do two or three per burner, they support each other. Leave the brinjals on the heat, turning every 4–5 minutes with tongs. They steam in their skins and the outside develops a delicious char-grilled flavour. You could do this on an outdoor grill, but we like the urban ruggedness of this method! The brinjals should be very soft inside (you'll be able to feel with a pinch of your fingers) after 16–24 minutes.
- Place the cooked brinjals in a colander, tearing the skin here and there (if it isn't torn and charred already) so that the bitter juices can run out. Leave for 30 minutes to an hour. Squash the brinjals again in the colander to extract more bitter juices.
- Then peel off the skin and place the flesh in the bowl of a food processor. It's a messy business; avoid too many charred bits getting into your baba ganoush.
- Blitz the brinjal with 3 cloves of crushed garlic, 2.5ml cumin, 5ml Za'tar, 7.5ml salt, pepper to taste, 250ml creamed cheese, 100g Danish feta (optional), juice of ½ lemon and 20g Italian parsley into a dreamy spread.
- Spoon the baba ganoush onto a small platter or into a dipping bowl, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with a pinch of sumac to garnish. ↑