

Salad Days

Yes, you should be eating salad all year long but we bet you agree that nothing tastes better than fresh, local, in season leafy greens and veggies. To help you build a better bowl we asked Nicki Sizemore for a few easy, innovative ideas. The Cold Spring-based chef, cookbook author, and food blogger (fromscratchfest.com) focuses on flavor-packed, gluten-free recipes. Here are three to toss up for light, refreshing main dish meals.



Grilled Pepper & Sweet Corn Salad + Creamy Avocado Lime Dressing

Serves: 4 | Prep time: 15 minutes | Cooking time: 15 minutes

This is the salad of my dreams. Lightly charred sweet peppers and grilled corn are tossed with romaine lettuce, grains, toasted pepitas, crumbled cotija or feta cheese, and a creamy (dairy-free) avocado lime dressing. It's the kind of meal that begs to be eaten outdoors. We whip it up for weekend lunches in the summer or serve it alongside barbecue chicken or fish for dinner. You can even grill the vegetables, make the dressing and cook the grains over the weekend, then throw the salad together in seconds later in the week. Your weekday self will thank you! Use any whole grains you like, such as quinoa, brown rice, sorghum, farro, or wheat berries.

Creamy Avocado Lime Dressing:

2 Tbsp fresh lime juice
2 Tbsp rice vinegar
¼ cup water
¼ cup neutral vegetable oil (such as grapeseed)
1 garlic clove, coarsely chopped
½ jalapeño, seeds and ribs discarded (unless you like it spicy, then keep them in!)
1 medium avocado
¼ cup lightly packed cilantro leaves
1 small scallion, thinly sliced
½ tsp honey
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Bowls:

1 medium red bell pepper, quartered
1 medium yellow bell pepper, quartered
1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 ears corn
2 cups cooked grains, cooled
1 romaine heart, coarsely chopped
2 scallions, thinly sliced
Toasted pumpkin seeds (pepitas), for serving
Crumbled cotija or feta cheese, for serving

For the dressing:

In a blender, combine all of the ingredients, and season with salt and pepper. Blend until smooth (there might still be some small chunks, and that's OK). Taste and adjust seasonings as needed.

Do ahead: The dressing can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.

For the bowls:

1. Preheat the grill to medium-high.
2. Drizzle the red and yellow peppers with the olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and rub with the oil (on all sides) to lightly coat. Discard the dark green outer husks of the corn, leaving the inner husks intact. Peel back the inner husks halfway and pull out the silk. Discard the silk. Wrap the cobs back in their husks.
3. Arrange the peppers and corn on the grill. Cook, flipping the peppers and turning the corn occasionally, until the peppers are lightly charred on both sides, and the corn kernels are bright yellow and lightly toasted, about 8–10 minutes total. Transfer the vegetables to a cutting board. Coarsely chop the peppers, and cut the corn kernels off the cobs. Let cool. **Do ahead:** The grilled vegetables can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.
4. Place the vegetables in a large bowl, and add the grains, romaine, and scallions. Season with salt and pepper. Toss with just enough dressing to coat (you won't need it all). Top with pepitas and crumbled cheese. Serve with the remaining dressing on the side.





Healthy Grilled Panzanella Salad

Serves: 4–6 as a main course, 8–10 as a side dish

Prep time: 35 minutes | Cooking time: 15 minutes

This recipe incorporates a bounty of summer vegetables into one of the best salads ever. With creamy mozzarella, grilled bread, and a garlicky red wine vinaigrette, it's a healthy meal or side dish that's packed with flavor and texture. Feel free to use other vegetables according to what you have or like. Also, you can swap out the mozzarella for other sources of protein, such as grilled chicken, canned white beans, feta cheese, or good quality canned tuna. I often add grated Parmesan as well (simply because I love it). The anchovy in the dressing adds depth and complexity to the vinaigrette, but you won't taste it. However, you can omit it for a vegetarian version.

Vinaigrette

- ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- 1 large clove garlic, grated on a microplane
- 1 Tbsp minced shallot
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 anchovy, rinsed and finely chopped (optional)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salad

- 2 medium zucchini, trimmed, cut lengthwise into ½-inch-thick slabs
- 2 medium yellow bell peppers, cored and seeded, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 medium red onion, cut into ¼-inch-thick rings
- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- ½ loaf Italian bread or 1 small gluten-free baguette, cut into 1-inch-thick slices
- 2 lbs ripe tomatoes, cored and coarsely chopped
- ½ cup coarsely chopped fresh basil
- ½ lb fresh mozzarella, cut into ½-inch pieces

Make the vinaigrette

In a small bowl, combine the red wine vinegar, grated garlic, shallot, oregano, and anchovy (if using). Season with salt and pepper. Whisk in the olive oil. **Do ahead:** The vinaigrette can be refrigerated for up to 1 week.

Grill the veggies and assemble the salad

1. Preheat a grill or grill pan to medium-high heat.
2. Place zucchini, peppers, and red onion slices on a large baking sheet. Drizzle with the olive oil and the balsamic vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Toss gently to coat. Grill the vegetables, flipping once, until they're crisp-tender with grill marks on both sides, about 2 minutes per side for the zucchini and 3–4 minutes per side for the onion and peppers. Transfer the vegetables back to the baking sheet, and let cool. **Do ahead:** The grilled veggies can be refrigerated for up to 4 days before using.
3. Grill the slices of bread until toasted with grill marks on both sides, about 1–3 minutes total. Cut the vegetables and bread into 1-inch pieces, and place them in a large bowl. Add the tomatoes, basil, and mozzarella. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
4. Let the salad sit at room temperature for 10 minutes to allow the flavors to meld. Before serving, toss the salad and taste it again—add more salt and pepper if needed, and if the salad tastes a bit flat, drizzle in a bit more red wine vinegar (the flavors will mute as it rests).



Vietnamese Rice Noodle Salad

Serves: 4–6 | Prep time: 30 minutes | Cooking time: 10 minutes

Brimming with crunchy cucumbers, yellow squash, peanuts, chiles, and a slew of basil and mint, this salad is light and refreshing—perfect for sultry summer evenings. Serve the salad on its own or turn it into a main course by adding grilled shrimp or chicken. To make garlicky grilled shrimp skewers, marinate 1 pound of peeled jumbo shrimp in 4 grated garlic cloves plus enough olive oil to coat. Season with salt and pepper and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Thread the shrimp onto soaked wooden skewers (pro tip: double up the skewers so that the shrimp don't flip around!), and grill on high until cooked through, about 3–4 minutes per side. Sprinkle the shrimp with fresh lime juice before serving.

Dressing:

- ¼ cup lime juice
- ¼ cup rice vinegar
- 1 large garlic clove, grated
- 1 tsp grated ginger
- 2 Tbsp honey
- 2 Tbsp toasted sesame oil
- 1 Tbsp neutral vegetable oil
- 1–2 Tbsp fish sauce
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Salad:

- 12 oz. rice noodles (Pad Thai style)
- ½ medium English (or Persian) cucumbers, halved and thinly sliced

- 1 medium yellow squash or zucchini, halved and thinly sliced
- ½ cup lightly packed fresh mint, coarsely chopped
- ½ cup lightly packed basil or cilantro, coarsely chopped
- 1–2 chiles (such as jalapeños or serranos), thinly sliced
- 2 large scallions, thinly sliced, plus more for serving
- ½ cup roasted salted peanuts (or cashews), coarsely chopped, plus more for serving
- Grilled shrimp or chicken (optional)
- Sriracha or chile sauce, for serving (optional)

Make the dressing

In a bowl or jar, combine the lime juice, rice vinegar, garlic, and ginger. If you have the time, let it sit for 5–10 minutes to let the flavors infuse. Add the honey, sesame oil, vegetable oil, and 1–2 tablespoons of fish sauce to taste. Season with salt and pepper and whisk or shake to combine. **Do ahead:** The dressing can be refrigerated for up to 5 days.

Make the salad

1. Cook the rice noodles according to the package directions. Drain the noodles and rinse them in cold water.
2. Place the noodles in a large bowl and add the cucumber, squash, mint, basil, chiles (to taste, depending on how spicy you like it), scallions, and peanuts. Pour the dressing over top and toss to coat. Taste and season with salt if needed. Garnish with additional peanuts and scallions. If you'd like, top the salad with grilled shrimp or chicken. Serve with sriracha or chile sauce for drizzling, if desired.