

# Sensational Salads



## Harvest Goodness From Plant To Plate

by

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# Discover Edible Blossoms From The Garden For Your Sensational Salads

When looking for ways to turn an ordinary salad into a gourmet treat, many people have turned to edible flowers. But, you don't have to make a beeline for your flower garden to find flowers. Instead, you may want to take a second look at your vegetable garden, herb garden, and even your lawn. Perhaps the blossoms you see there are more than just pretty - maybe they are delicious, too.

## Edible Blooms in the Vegetable Patch

Yes, many edible flowers are not actually found in your flower garden, but are staring right at you from the vegetable garden. Some of these 'edible blooms' you know quite well, even if you haven't thought of them as the flowering part of your vegetables. The broccoli and cauliflower we are familiar with are both actually flowers, just as the artichoke is also the flower of the plant.

Not only are you eating a flower when you eat a head of cauliflower or broccoli, but you can also allow the flower to flower, so to speak, and enjoy that treat as well. The yellow flower of the broccoli can be picked, cleaned, and enjoyed sprinkled on top of a bed of lettuce tossed in a light vinaigrette. Watch for the flowering shoots on cauliflower and artichokes, too, and experiment with the flavors to create a gourmet salad that is both delicious and colorful.

Some of our favorite vegetables have lovely blossoms that we watch disappear as the vegetable forms. Zucchini, or courgette for instance, has a brilliant yellow blossom that is absolutely beautiful to look at. Other squash varieties such as Patti Pans share this gift, as well. But, squash blossoms have a surprise in store for us; they are also delicious!

There are a number of ways to prepare squash blossoms, but one favorite is to pick the blossoms when they are still small and closed, then wash and prepare by dipping in a light batter and frying quickly in a hot skillet. This makes a delicious somewhat sweet surprise on top of a mixed green or fresh spinach salad. Another favorite is to scatter the blossoms raw around the plate. No matter what, squash blossoms will turn any salad into a gourmet salad.

## Herbs Doing Double

We all know that fresh herbs add a gourmet touch to any salad. But did you know that many herbs have edible blooms as well as the foliage we're familiar with? Thyme, for instance, is a very fragrant and versatile herb, but when you harvest the flower, you'll find a secret ingredient for a gourmet salad, or even a tasty sauce or dressing.

If you plant basil, fennel, and cilantro, you may want to gather the flowers as well as the herb greens. Go ahead and experiment in your favorite salads and other dishes. A less known, but certainly valuable herb, is borage. This prolific herb will have you thinking you smell a fresh cucumber, and the flowers borage produces are just as tasty as they are pretty.

With a patch of dill you'll have plenty to experiment with. Harvest the yellow tops as they appear, but before you see the seeds form. Sprinkle on your green salad or use in a creamy yogurt dressing. Dill is the perfect flowering herb to add freshness to any salad.

Unexpected delights can be found when you allow an onion or garlic bulb to blossom. Designate a little patch of these plants to flower, and enjoy a delicious surprise in your salad. Instead of clipping your chives down to the ground, allow the pretty blue flowers to just open, then cut them immediately and serve on top of a spinach salad for a real gourmet look and taste.

## A Weed by Any Other Name

You may want to pay attention the next time you're mowing your lawn, too. Those dandelions you've been cursing could be your next tasty gourmet salad. This weed is actually an herb with edible flowers and greens. Pick the flowers while they are still closed buds for a sweet taste similar to honey. Once the flower opens, it will be bitter. Aside from the buds, the dandelion greens make a wonderful salad, but again, pick them while they are very young and small. Who knew that pesky little weed could be so tasty and elegant!

Clover is another tasty treat that may be hidden away in your lawn. You may have seen either red clover or white clover growing among the grass. Some regions produce an edible clover that produces both a leaf and stem to enjoy as well as a small flower. When identifying clover to eat, be sure to check your region's type of clover before you proceed.

Now that you know just how many options there are for finding gourmet ingredients right in your own vegetable garden, herb garden, and even your lawn, maybe it's time to take a closer look. Those buds and blossoms that are so pretty, may also provide you with some gourmet salads. The general rule is **if you can eat the plant, you can eat the blossom**. However, not all vegetables, herbs, or weeds produce a blossom that's edible, or tasty, or that should even be eaten, for that matter. Before you bite in, do a bit of local research. Then you can enjoy the brilliance that these blossoms can add to your gourmet salads.



# Create Dazzling Delicious Fresh Fruit Salads

If you enjoy making fruit salads as part of your summer fare during picnics and family get-togethers, you're going to love the suggestions I have for you here. Knowing how to combine the right blend of fruits in a salad, either alone or with other ingredients, is the first step to creating fruit salads that impress and delight your guests.

## Combine Ingredients that Compliment

Certain fruits are better candidates for a combination of greens and fruit salad, but that doesn't mean you can't experiment a little to find new flavors you enjoy. Summer melons like honeydew and cantaloupe are always good, but a number of different fruits and berries are equally compatible with some basic greens such as romaine lettuce or other mixed varieties. Consider adding, for instance, grapefruit segments to add zip and zing to an otherwise traditional spinach salad. It's all about the flavors playing off each other.

If it's just fruit in the salad you're making, the sky's the limit as to what you might combine for a delicious treat with your meals. Lots of different berries are in season in the warmer months, so consider adding two or three different varieties to a more basic fruit salad made with bananas, apples, and grapes. A little splash of freshly squeezed lemon juice will help keep everything fresh.

Stick with a light dressing, like a vinaigrette that's not too strong or too sweet. This will allow the tartness and sweetness of the strawberries, mango, peaches, cranberries, or whatever you use to come through in the salad. And, don't forget the texture. Adding some roasted almonds adds a bit of crunch and depth in flavor to this type of salad creation. The salty flavor of the nuts also compliment the sweetness of the fruit. Using opposing flavors will often 'marry' the ingredients together, creating a perfectly blended compliment of flavors.

## Create Interest With One or Two Surprising Ingredients

You only need a slice or two of an exotic, unusual fruit to create excitement in a salad. Star fruit, dragon fruit, dates, apricots, figs, and papaya are just some suggestions, and they don't have to be considered a dessert salad either. Combining one or two of these fancy fruits in a mixed green salad, chicken salad, tuna salad, shrimp salad, crab salad, or meat based salad could create quite a buzz at your next dinner.

Remember, there's also a selection of spices and herbs that do wonders to perk up a fruit salad. And don't just think about sweet spices like cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, and allspice. Mixing hot pepper flakes or chili powder with sweet ingredients often is the perfect compliment. Savory herbs like rosemary, dill, and thyme are also surprising when used to enhance fruit salads.

# When Presentation Matters the Most

Special occasions call for a salad that looks as good as it tastes. This is where you add additional ingredients and combine colors and layers to make a statement with your delicious creation.

Use a melon baller, for instance, to scoop up delicate pieces of the melons you choose. Then, include layers of color with blueberries, blackberries, sliced cherries, or raspberries. Garnish your fruit salad with lemon balm or mint leaves for extra color. Other fruit favorites include fresh pineapple, kiwi, or tangerine slices. Think about shapes, sizes, and color, then mix and match for a salad that looks as good as it tastes.

Mixing fresh fruit with creamy layers of vanilla pudding is another pretty salad to serve guests for a special dinner party. Add a little whipped cream and a maraschino cherry on top for a final touch. A similar look is possible by mixing cream cheese and condensed milk together for the base that holds your favorite fresh fruits.

Drain your fruits well before combining them, then you can even make a gourmet version of the old-fashioned fruit salads found on holiday tables many years ago. Make it gourmet by using crème fraiche and lots of fresh fruit, including berries, and even roasted nuts.

These suggestions are just a quick look at the possibilities for making gourmet fruit salads using your imagination and good taste. Having a healthy appetite for adventure will spur on the type of creativity you'll need to make splendid fruit salads that are an unexpected pleasure.



# Fire Up The Grill or Barbecue For Surprisingly Sensational Fruit Salads

We've been trying to keep our meals light and interesting, and our grill has played center stage. Now if you're thinking that grilling is all about heavy meals of barbecued meats, you'll be surprised what other foods actually are perfect for the grill.

## Setting the Stage for Grilled Fruit Salads

If you're mixing your grilled fruit in a green salad, be sure to choose your salad green carefully. Grilling adds a deeper flavor to fruit, so something hearty like arugula, romaine, watercress, or a mix of colorful greens might be best to form the bed of the salad and to compliment.

A grilled fruit salad also does well with a light vinaigrette dressing, made from basic ingredients like olive oil, salt and pepper, and your choice of vinegar. However, you might enjoy a creamy salad dressing made with honey and yogurt. Or perhaps a mixture of brown sugar, heavy cream, and red wine vinegar sounds tasty to you. There are plenty of possibilities to compliment your grilled fruit salad.

## Choose Fruit that Suits the Grill

Once you've got the stage set, then it's a matter of choosing fruits that grill well. Apricot halves are first up, combined with toasted nuts and thin slices of bacon, this makes a delightful gourmet twist with any salad green. Try grilling pineapple and mango slices, garnish with fresh mint leaves, and mix with crunchy cold butter lettuce for a surprising salad that will really please your dinner guests or family.

Even fruits like plums, watermelon, peaches, and nectarines are good to grill for salads and it doesn't have to be a large salad of greens, either. For instance, cut watermelon into four inch squares and grill quickly on one side, flip and grill on the other side until you see grill marks form. Then serve on a bed of arugula and top with feta cheese, and drizzle balsamic vinaigrette over. You now have a gourmet salad with just a few ingredients. Grilling the watermelon makes all the difference.

A grilled fruit salad could also be exclusively made with grilled fruit. Try grilling a whole pineapple, cut lengthwise in half, treating the pineapple as the fruit bowl. Top with small pieces of fruit such as red pears, kiwi, bananas, or cactus fruit and set the grill on high, grilling just until the pineapple chars a little. Remove from the grill and serve as is or with a dollop of Greek yogurt. Both halves of the pineapple becomes the salad itself.

## Mixing up Main Dishes With Grilled Fruit

For a heartier main dish, try putting chunks of fruit on a kabob skewer alternating with firm pieces of fish like halibut, swordfish, or salmon, or shrimp, scallops, or even pieces of chicken. Grill until everything chars a bit, then serve over brown rice. Most people expect kabobs to have vegetables, so the grilled fruit makes a nice surprise. Of course, some vegetables compliment certain fruit, as well. Sweet onion on the kabob adds a nice flavor contrast to pineapple, for instance. Just use your creativity when you put your fruit kabobs together for the grill.

Grilled fruit can also be a garnish for beef, chicken, fish, or even ham. Cut wedges of papaya, mango, pineapple, and maybe a red pepper and sweet onion, and grill until slightly charred. Then cool and cut into small pieces and toss together with a light vinaigrette. This grilled 'fruit salsa' makes a perfect garnish. Make it spicy or savory if you wish by adding hot sauce, a bit of cayenne pepper, or some fresh herbs.

## Don't Forget Grilled Fruit Desserts

A variety of fruits can be grilled to produce a tasty topping for ice cream, pound cake, or other treats. Grilled bananas topped with ice cream and caramel sauce is a favorite that comes to mind immediately. You can even put chunks of chocolate on while the bananas grill to create another layer of flavor.

Fruit compote made on the grill is another twist on a favorite. Rather than just boil or bake fruit pieces in a pan with a liquid, put the fruit on the grill on high heat, quickly grilling until you have grill marks and the fruit is softened. Move the fruit onto a piece of heavy duty foil, top with a mixture of brown sugar, butter, and honey. Then seal the foil into pouches and continue cooking on the grill until fruit is very soft. The grilling adds a whole new flavor to your traditional compote.

If you have never considered putting fruit on your grill, this is your chance to experiment. It's surprising how many fruits cook up so well on the open pit. Once you have your fruit grilled, you'll find all sorts of ways to enjoy them. You may become so hooked on grilling fruit that now find it will be hard to make room for the barbecued meat!





# Fresh Herbs Are The Key To Sensational Salads

When you see a professional chef throw together a gourmet salad, chances are there are at least a few fresh herbs in the mix. The tender, bold, savory, sweet, pungent, earthy, and otherwise distinct flavors that fresh herbs provide set the stage for every gourmet salad.

Including herbs in your own homemade salads will definitely take them up a notch to gourmet status. It's easy when you know what and how to use herbs, as well as how to grow them yourself.

## Indoors or Outdoors

Truthfully, you don't need garden space to grow quality, great-tasting herbs. All you need is a controlled environment where light and moisture make growing herbs possible. That can be indoors, especially if you can more carefully control the growing process better than you could outdoors.

You can get as complicated as you want, or keep it simple. Garden centers make it easy by providing herb kits, pots, grow lights, and equipment that can help your indoor herb garden thrive. The key elements to control are temperature and moisture. With prepackaged kits, you don't have to guess.

These kits allow you to grow herbs easily, even in winter months. You just need an adequate amount of sunlight or artificial light. The recommended minimums for light are 14 hours for artificial lights or 6 hours for sunlight. And the suggested sunlight amount is often filtered, so you may not even need a windowsill.

Along with light, you'll need to watch for pests that can thrive in warmer indoor environments. With proper air circulation and a spray bottle of soapy water close at hand, you can control this problem adequately. Now with a proper watering schedule, you are all set.

Growing herbs outdoors may be possible if you have a good location, proper sunlight, and an adequate growing season. There's a delicate pH balance necessary here, and supporting your garden soil with fertilizer and organic material may be necessary. You may want to create a compost pile specifically for this purpose.

For outdoor gardens, ideally you'd want to create an area close to the kitchen for convenience when harvesting your herbs for the great recipes you have in mind. Watering and weeding will take more time outdoors, but the extra work will be worth it come harvest time. You may also consider planting the herbs in containers outdoors. That way you can place them where the growing conditions are best, as well as control the environment, and keep them convenient to the kitchen, too.



# Good Choices for Gourmet Salad Herbs

What herbs make good choices for gourmet garden salads? Where do we begin! Chives, cilantro, lemon balm, parsley, basil, thyme, dill, mint, sage, watercress, marjoram, oregano, fennel, rosemary, and tarragon are just the beginning. Chevril, mint, and lemongrass are other popular choices for herb garden enthusiasts. Lovage leaves are an under-appreciated herb that adds a spicy celery-like taste to a salad.

Some herbs make a better addition to a dressing than to the actual salad due to their strong flavor. Consider grinding stronger herbs like rosemary or sage, then whisking the herb into a light vinaigrette dressing. Fennel may be too strong for some people to bite into, but when you grind or chop it, then add to an oil and vinegar dressing, the flavor mellows out just right. Other herbs like mint, cilantro, parsley, dill, and thyme can be sprinkled about the salad after chopping to bring out the flavor.

## Other Recipe Ideas

Herbs aren't just for your typical green salad and dressings, either. They can add delicious life to things like fresh-sliced tomatoes in balsamic vinegar, fruit salads, and sandwich spreads. Add fresh mint leaves to fruit salads, too. Create smooth, savory herb butter for basting grilled vegetables, meats, or even bread to go along with your salads.

Think of all the traditional foods you prepare regularly and consider adding fresh garden herbs to make your dishes even better. A simple cucumber salad comes alive with a little fresh mint. Any potato salad will benefit from parsley, rosemary, and dill. Fennel is an especially good herb to add to roasted turkey, chicken, and pork, then serve the meat over a bed of mixed greens topped with a vinaigrette dressing with more fennel and you have layers of flavor that scream gourmet!

Any time of year is the right time to consider planting an herb garden. With fresh herbs available right in your own kitchen or garden, you don't have to be a professional chef to toss together a real honest-to-goodness gourmet garden salad.



## Sensational Salads Start With Creative Beginnings

Growing a salad garden is all about looking forward to the harvest. In our imagination, all our hard work seems to come together in one big salad bowl. No matter what we plant, we can see it all freshly picked and served right out of the garden in all its glory with a nice, light dressing.

But, sometimes our imagination doesn't quite take shape when we start planting. We suddenly get limited in our thinking when it comes to salads. We know we should plant some lettuce. We know we should plant something to go on top of the lettuce, like tomatoes, and cucumbers.

From the first glimmer of the perfect garden, to the reality of the harvest, something gets lost. It could be all the hard work, or it could be there are too many choices. Perhaps we fall into the same pattern each growing season. No matter what the reason, our beautiful harvest salad bowl becomes mundane.

Is there something we could do between planting leaf lettuce for the bottom of our salad and planting tomatoes for the top? There sure is! We can get our bountiful gourmet salad back in our imagination, in our garden, and on our table by following a few simple tips to create the basis for our beautiful salad.

## Choose Creative Greens For Your Salad Base

Sometimes all a gourmet garden salad needs is different types of greens to make it something unique, interesting, and more flavorful. Step away from the standard lettuce varieties you've planted year after year and consider the countless varieties of lettuce available, and so much more.

You'll recognize some of these greens from a fancy dinner menu. Why not include them in your own garden and on your own table? Plant gourmet greens like arugula, endive, Bibb, Boston, radicchio, watercress, and spinach along with the better known varieties of romaine lettuce and red and green leaf lettuce. A mixture of young salad greens, sometimes called mesclun, can also be found in the garden supply shops to plant for your gourmet salad.

Think beyond lettuce and plant vegetables like kale, kohlrabi, mustard, Swiss chard, escarole, and collard greens. Don't forget red and green cabbage. There are many vegetables that can be turned into the 'bed' to create a new and interesting salad. For instance, grow broccoli and use the stems to create a salad by shredding the tender insides. Shave curls from firm fresh cucumbers to create another surprising basis for a salad bowl.

Sweet onions tossed with balsamic vinaigrette can also form the 'bed' of your salad. Add more crunch with sweet carrot shreds, or even a bit of spicy 'bite' with chopped radishes. Who says a salad has to be 'green?' But, if you want to include some green to keep the comfort level of your salad, flash-blanch some string beans and toss in with the onions. Or, try tossing your sweet onions and balsamic vinaigrette salad with snow peas or cucumber slices. Your 'greens' – the bed or basis of your salad – can really be any color, just as long as it can support the other ingredients.

As you can see, the bed or greens of a good gourmet salad can be as varied as the toppings. Look beyond a leaf of lettuce to find the surprising ingredients needed to bring your dreams of a glorious garden salad to light



# Creating Sensational Salads With Edible Flowers

We've all seen beautiful wedding cakes with real flowers, but did you know that edible flowers can be used in other dishes? A simple green salad is instantly turned into a gourmet delight with the addition of just one edible flower. But, you don't have to be a master chef for this gourmet trick. Just take a look in your own flower garden.

## First, a Word of Caution

To begin, let's be clear that one should never pick flowers to eat from alongside a road or other right-of-way. These areas are typically sprayed with poisonous chemicals to slow the growth of weeds. Only eat flowers that have been cultivated in an environmentally clean area or garden.

Do the research first to make sure the species you are entertaining eating is, in fact, edible. Some regions produce both edible and inedible varieties of similar plants. Your county's extension office may be a good place to start, as well as a local nursery.

Also, if you have allergies, specifically to pollen, be aware that even if you aren't allergic to a particular flower you are about to eat, that flower may be related to a plant you are allergic to. Even though you remove the stamen and pistil, the pollen is part of the flower structure itself.

Once you have determined that a flower is safe to eat, and that you are not allergic, you are ready to learn how to find, clean, serve, and enjoy these edible flowers.

## Pretty & Tasty Bouquets

There are many flowers that have wonderful color, flavor, and design that aren't found in exotic locations. These flowers are often found in country gardens, window boxes, or even hanging baskets. Let's take a look at some of the more familiar flowers that can provide your salads with a gourmet twist:

Bachelor Button, or Cornflowers, are well known for their bright blue color and best described as having a clove-like flavor that is a bit sweet and spicy at the same time. Although they are often used just as a pretty garnish, when cleaned, the little petals can be sprinkled over a bed of mixed greens for a pretty and spicy touch.

Fuchsias are those exotic-looking brightly colored flowers that you'll often find in hanging planters, most likely around Mother's Day. The blossoms are a little on the bitter side, but make a nice addition to a savory salad such as a spinach salad with a tangy dressing. You can also use the blossom to compliment a buttery or sweet lettuce salad, playing the gentle sweetness off the somewhat bitter surprise from the pretty blossom.

Carnations are eaten by separating the sweet petals from the white base, which is very bitter. Scatter the petals on top of a bed of romaine lettuce and add complimentary flavors of both sweet and tangy ingredients and a light dressing. There are a wide range of colors so you can find something for any salad.

Chrysanthemums are big, bold, beautiful flowers that have big, bold, beautiful flavors. In colors ranging from reds and oranges, to creams and yellows, these edible favorites have a somewhat peppery taste. The petals may be lightly blanched in boiling water before adding to your salads. The base of the flower is very bitter, so be sure to use only the petals.

Day Lilies are a favorite in many gardens because they are easy to grow and very showy. But, with their sweet flavor, they are now one of the most popular edible flower. Again, you want to remove the petals from the bitter base. The wide variety of this flower can actually provide a wide variety of flavors. The large petals are somewhat chewy and make a real statement on any salad.

English Daisies are so familiar to us that we often walk right by them without noticing. Pick the petals off (he loves me, he loves me not) and sprinkle on top of an ordinary green salad and you'll have something unexpected. The flavor is rather mild, so they are used mostly for the pretty gourmet look they give a salad.

Johnny Jump-Ups are another very familiar flower that often goes unnoticed. Similar in appearance to pansies, the blossoms have a slightly minty or wintergreen taste, making them perfect as a garnish for a fresh cucumber salad. Just imagine the purple petals sprinkled over the green cucumber slices. Very pretty, and tasty, too.

Pot Marigolds are a common flower with uncommon flavor and color. These flowers were used for many years to add color to soups, and now are often enjoyed sprinkled over salads to add a citrus-like flavor. Use on any salad you would squeeze a lemon or zest an orange over.

Of course, there are more exotic flowers that add unique flavor, color, and overall design impact to a simple salad. But, these flowers are the ones many of us can grow in our very own gardens. With just a little imagination, you can plan, plant, and harvest a floral bouquet to turn any salad into a gourmet specialty to rival any professional chef.



# Squash Is The Glory Of The Garden And The Sweetheart Of Gourmet Salads

Many gardeners experience tremendous pride when they harvest their first squash, and it's no wonder. Squash, any squash, is a beautiful, boastful crop. Part of the thrill is the anticipation, since many varieties of squash take quite a while to appear and ripen. Another reason is, of course, they are just so pretty.

There are so many varieties of squash, that sometimes we don't actually think of them all as the same vegetable with similar characteristics in cooking. While we often consider some squash, like yellow, or summer squash, and zucchini to be suitable for gourmet salads, we seldom consider the 'fall' squashes to be worth a try in a salad bowl. We sometimes get stuck thinking about preparing squash in the same ways we have, over and over again. Let's see if we can get unstuck, shall we?

## See Squash in a New Light

If you imagine your beautiful yellow squash, also called summer squash by some, sliced, and stir fried, then buttered and served, that's just fine. And, you can make another zucchini casserole with tomatoes and cheese, or another loaf of bread. It's all tasty to be sure.

You can once again bake your butternut squash with brown sugar, and that's good, too. You've got acorn squash that's ready to bake, as well. It all sounds like a warm, and lovely meal. Even a squash as fun as spaghetti squash has you in a rut, baking, scraping out the 'noodles', then salt, pepper, butter, and Parmesan cheese, right?

But, when the rest of the garden looks like a giant salad bowl, wouldn't you like to include your lovely squash in that bowl, as well? All you need to do is imagine your squash, any squash, in a new way to create lovely gourmet salads.

## Use Fresh Ideas

Some squash varieties are so tender that you can actually cut them super-thin, shoestring style, and use as you would cabbage in a coleslaw. Zucchini and yellow squash are the best known for eating fresh picked and raw. Combine julienned slices with crunchy vegetables like radishes, red or green bell peppers, basil, mint, or dill for a fresh new take on a couple very familiar squashes.

Of course, a fresh gourmet salad can also be made with squash as a complimenting flavor rather than the base for a salad. A salad of tomatoes and cucumbers, for instance, can be served with a topping of a tangy summer squash and zucchini salsa. Prepare the salsa using these two squashes, finely chopped, with onion, red pepper flakes, and a good balsamic vinegar mixed with oil and fresh herbs. This makes an excellent topping for other greens, as well.

# Roast Your Way to a Sensational Salad

Some squash has been waiting in the wings for years to be invited to your salad bowl. Butternut squash is a garden favorite that blends well with a number of sweet and savory ingredients. Acorn squash is another well known squash that hasn't found its way into our gourmet salads quite enough.

These pungent squash are best when roasted in an oven until golden brown. Cut the squash open and cut into sections until you can cut away the outer skin. Then cut into cubes, drizzle with oil, salt and pepper, and put in a hot oven until just tender and brown. Remove and cool slightly, then toss in a salad using crisp greens and ingredients that stand up well to the deep flavors of these hearty squash. Ingredients that go well would include arugula, kale, and spinach, along with sweet onion, garlic, dried cranberries, nuts, and a variety of cheeses, just to name a few.

The sweetness of roasted squash also plays well with fruit. Include grilled pineapple rings, peaches, pears, or tart apples to your salad for a very elegant gourmet salad creation. A sprinkling of creamy baby mozzarella or goat cheese might be just the topping to complete the meal.

To dress your salad, you want a light vinaigrette that won't mask the incredible flavor of the roasted squash. Mix fresh ingredients like lemon juice and herbs, then blend in oil, and drizzle over your masterpiece.

As mentioned, spaghetti squash is another fun squash we look forward to harvesting. To turn it into a new treat, start by cutting it in half lengthways and roasting it until tender. Cool and remove the 'noodles' from the squash's insides. Then, create a fresh tasting 'pasta salad' with your spaghetti squash. Toss the 'noodles' in a big salad bowl with freshly diced crunchy veggies, even diced zucchini and summer squash, tomatoes, cucumber, and other salad ingredients and dress with a tangy vinaigrette. Serve cold just like you would any pasta salad. You've got the taste of the roasting and the freshness of the other vegetables. Now that's a gourmet salad!

The varieties of squash are just about endless. The variety of ways to fix squash should also stretch the imagination. We only covered a few here, but hope you feel inspired to experiment with this incredible bounty from the garden to create your own gourmet garden salads.



## Turn The Humble Tomato Into A Sensational Salad Star

When new gardeners start plotting out their garden, typically the first harvest they envision is the tomato. Yes, the good old tomato ranks first among all the vegetables we imagine in our dream gardens. Why is that? Because the garden tomato is not only easy to grow, but freshly picked, is the tastiest of all vegetables.

However, tomatoes have often been thought of as the 'blue collar' vegetable – good, but not gourmet. But even a good old fashioned tomato can produce culinary brilliance when treated with a little imagination.



### A Little Background

The tomato wasn't always so beloved or accepted. At one point, the tomato was considered suspect, even poison. However, as the tomato traveled from South America, to Central America, to North America, and then into Europe, this fruit (yes, the tomato is a fruit) kept gaining favor.

This unsuspecting treat started out as a tiny, gnarly, even wild fruit. Growers have been developing hybrid tomatoes ever since, creating bigger, smoother crops. However, during this hybrid process, we've lost much of the flavor of the true tomato.

Growing your own tomatoes can help you get back to the basics; a sweet, firm, flavorful tomato. Once you get closer to the tomatoes that the Aztecs worshiped, you'll enjoy flavors that will have you singing the praises of tomatoes as a gourmet treat.

### Old Fashioned Favorite Takes Center Stage

Tomatoes are one of the more versatile veggies in the garden. It's difficult to think of tomatoes as gourmet, but it's time to rethink. When you plant a tomato, you expect a fresh salad at harvest time, but perhaps you haven't given a gourmet salad much thought. Most likely you've thought of the tomato as an addition to a green salad. It's time to give fresh tomatoes a bigger stage on the family table.

Yes, tomatoes give a glorious boost to mixed greens in a salad. But, as a central ingredient in salads, you can't go wrong with the bright colors and flavors of the garden grown tomato. There are so many ways to turn this simple side show into a headliner.

When choosing tomato plants or tomatoes at your farmer's market, choose heirloom tomatoes or home-style, not hybrid, tomatoes for the best of both worlds. These tomatoes don't look like the tomatoes you may be used to in the produce aisles, but the further you get away from hybrids, the better the flavor.



Simple ideas for fresh tomatoes can produce gourmet classics. For instance, combine fresh diced tomatoes with prosciutto, baby mozzarella, fresh basil, and a drizzle of balsamic vinaigrette or even just a good olive oil, and you'll discover a salad that is bound to please even the most jaded gourmet. Or skip all the other ingredients and cut up a variety of tomatoes of all shapes, colors, sizes, and flavors for a surprising salad that's both simple and elegant. Splash with a mix of good olive oil and balsamic vinegar, a dash of kosher salt, and your choice of herbs to give the tomato a chance to really stand out.

Another option is to use fresh tomatoes as a bowl or 'vehicle' for a crab salad, tuna salad, shrimp salad, smoked salmon, or other main-dish style salad for a special luncheon or light dinner. Scoop the inside out of a large, sweet tomato, dice and combine with other fresh veggies, then fill the tomato 'bowl' and serve.

You can serve a hot salad with the same basic ideas. Saute onions and mushrooms, then toss with chopped kale and dill, put inside the tomato bowl, top with shredded provolone or mozzarella cheese and set under the broiler just long enough to melt the cheese. Now you have a wonderful hot salad, side dish, or luncheon favorite with unexpected flavors.

There is no end to the excitement a fresh garden tomato can elicit when combined with other imaginative flavors or when standing on its own fresh good taste. The gourmet happens when you get creative and think way beyond the notion that a tomato is just a supporting actor in your salad. Make it the star and taste the possibilities!



## Use Your Runaway Courgette Crop To Inspire Sensational Salads

From beginner to seasoned, gardeners all have one thing in common – zucchini. Every gardener knows the pleasure, and the pitfalls, of planting zucchini. We're talking about the all-time winner in vegetables that run amok.

If you plant even two hills, you will no doubt have more than enough to feed your family zucchini every day of the week and give away bushels to every neighbor within a ten mile radius. You will also get very, very tired of it and end up wasting more than you use. That is, unless you come up with new ways to serve this abundant vegetable. That's where learning how to create gourmet salads using zucchini comes in.

### Overrun With Choices for this Prolific Favorite

The first rule of using zucchini in gourmet salads is to pick them small. Young zucchini are perfect for fresh green salads. At this small size, you'll find the entire zucchini is firm and tender, without a seedy or pulpy inside. You don't even have to peel them, just scrub them and cut them up. You can slice the zucchini into very thin discs, use a peeler and shave them into curls, cut them into thin 'shoestring' style, or dice them if you prefer. Remember, harvest them when they are tiny and you will have the perfect zucchini, ready for your super salads.

Now the sky's the limit when it comes to salad fixings. Use the zucchini as the base and toss with crispy red bell peppers and sweet onions in a vinaigrette dressing. Let sit for a few minutes so the zucchini absorbs the flavor and you have a gourmet salad that will please any summer salad fanatic. Or toss together a simple salad using equal amounts of sliced zucchini and tomatoes, with fresh basil chiffonade and a lemon and oil dressing.

Make a tart, tangy, or spicy zucchini salsa or relish to serve on top of hearty greens like baby spinach, arugula, mustard greens, or kale. Mix tiny diced zucchini with diced cucumbers, chilies, green peppers, scallions, and herbs of your choice, and top with a drizzle of red wine vinegar and olive oil, with a sprinkling of kosher salt. Let sit for a few minutes so the flavors blend, then serve over a cold bed of greens. Sprinkle a bit of bleu cheese or feta on top for the full gourmet deal.

### In the Beginning, There Were Blossoms

But, before we even get to those young zucchini plants, have you noticed the bright yellow blossoms peeking out from underneath the big leaves? Those zucchini blossoms are your first opportunity to create a gourmet delight!

Gathering zucchini blossoms isn't tricky, but you don't want to ruin your zucchini crop in the process. Look for blossoms that are on the end of a thin stem. These are the 'male' blossoms and the ones you want to pick. Of course, you can pick a very small zucchini with the blossom still attached and use it like

that. But, if you pick too many of these 'female' blossoms, your zucchini crop will slow down.

Because the zucchini blossoms are so delicate, they don't last long off the stem. Pick and prepare the blossoms the same day. Gently wash the blossom and take a sharp paring knife and remove the spiky green parts just above the stem surrounding the blossom on the bottom. Cut the stem off to about a half inch or so. Then, use your knife to cut the blossom open lengthwise to 'butterfly' it. You'll see the stamen or pistil; be sure to remove this. Wash off any pollen or dirt that may have been left inside the blossom.

Now you have a gourmet garden treat that will impress even the greatest salad chef! Use the blossom as is to garnish your zucchini salad, or batter and fry it for a crispy surprise. Serve two or three fried blossoms on top of a green salad with zucchini relish for a special luncheon or light dinner. This is surely look and taste like a gourmet treat.

When you think of zucchini dishes, you most likely think of a skillet filled with zucchini, onion, tomato, and cheese. Perhaps you think of bread. But, you don't have to serve the same zucchini dishes if you know how to pick and serve zucchini at their tender best. Once you get a taste of tiny, fresh zucchini tossed perfectly in a gourmet salad, you may start plotting out another garden spot for next year!



## Purple Root Salad

Be not alarmed if you hate beetroot - I guarantee this will not be like the slimy pickled experience you have had before!

A staple in my repertoire that can be varied seasonally.

### Ingredients:

2 large beetroot - grated

4 medium carrots - grated (roughly the same amount of each, but this can be altered to taste)

Seasoning (salt and pepper) to taste and/or **herbs** and **spices** - I like cumin seeds or cumin powder with root vegetables.

**Dijon dressing** - see below - or any favorite dressing, the Tahini dressing works well, so does a citrus or orange dressing)

Then add (or not, its good like this with some **Salad Sprinkles** on top) anything such as dried fruit, orange slivers, tomato, cucumber, cooked green or black lentils, etc etc)

Mix together with the dressing and serve on a bed of greens. (Spinach, rocket, lettuce etc) and enjoy!  
- serves me till its gone



## Dijon Salad Dressing

### Ingredients:

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

1/4 cup cider vinegar or fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

2 teaspoons of agave nectar, raw honey, or pure maple syrup

1/4 - 1/2 teaspoon of sea salt

1 crushed garlic clove

Black pepper to taste

optional - oregano, majoram, thyme, etc

Everything goes into the blender and blitz until smooth and creamy.

Stores in a glass jar for a week or two



# Massaged Greens

serves 3-4

**(but I can eat half this in one go!)**

- 6 cups chopped greens, any type of kale, spinach, chard or mixture
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, or more
- 1 tablespoon flax oil (or additional olive oil)
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar or lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons shoyu (soya sauce)
- 2-3 spring onions, chopped (optional) (or leeks or onions)
- 1-2 cloves garlic, crushed (optional)
- 2-3 teaspoons finely grated ginger (optional)
- sea salt
- 1 cup or more of chopped herbs, such as basil, parsley, oregano etc or 1 tsp of dry

Wash the green and remove any tough stems. Chop finely and toss with olive oil, flax oil, cider vinegar and/or lemon, shoyu, green onion, garlic and ginger as desired. Use freshly cleaned paws to massage with love. Pay attention to tougher parts. Allow to stand and marinate, rubbing now and again for an hour or two. Toss in herbs and allow to stand 10 minutes to absorb flavour. Keeps well for a day or two sealed in fridge.



## Marinated Salad Sprinkles

Salad feeling a little boring? This is for you. Also makes a nice snack food.

### Ingredients:

Any Seeds such as:

Pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, flax (linseed), Hemp.

(seeds are better for you than nuts)

Put the seeds you are using into a bowl. (quantity of at least a cup, its not worth the gas for less!)

Into the bowl add:

A glug of olive oil, soy sauce, garlic, herbs, seasoning to taste and leave to marinade for a couple hours. It could be a day or more in the fridge or just until you are ready with the next hot oven. The seeds should be covered but not swimming in the marinade. Can vary the marinade to be more curry flavoured with curry powder or cumin seeds etc

Heat a baking tray (I do this when the oven is on for something else), tip the bowl full of seeds onto the hot tray and spread out so that it is a thin-ish layer. Put back in the oven and keep an eye, stirring every so often so that they brown evenly.

Cooking time will vary depending on the amount you have and how thick the layer of seeds are. but total oven time is about 15 - 20 mins.

When pale toasty golden remove and allow to cool.



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