

Baby Greens with Fresh Raspberries, Raspberry Vinaigrette, Candied Walnuts and Feta

Ingredients:

- 4 Cups assorted baby lettuces, washed and dried
- 1 pint fresh raspberries
- 2 Tbsp feta, crumbled
- *For vinaigrette:*
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp honey
- 2 Tbsp raspberry vinegar
- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 Tbsp canold oil
- *For candied walnuts:*
- 1 C walnut halves
- 1/2 C sugar
- 2 Tbsp water
- 1 tsp orange zest
- 1 C sugar

Method:

To make vinaigrette:

Whisk together mustard, honey and vinegar in a small bowl. Slowly whisk in oils to emulsify. Season with salt and pepper.

To make walnuts:

Combine 1 cup sugar and zest in a medium bowl. Heat remaining 1/2 C sugar and water in a heavy bottom pan over medium high heat. Do not stir or swirl pan, but allow the mixture to slowly start to bubble and turn golden brown. Quickly stir in walnuts off the heat just to coat nuts in the caramel. Pour nuts into orange sugar and toss with a wooden spoon to coat. Allow nuts to cool.

To assemble salad, toss the greens with enough vinaigrette just to lightly dress the leaves. Sprinkle in some raspberries, crumbled feta and candied walnuts.

This recipe epitomizes what I love about salads. When done right, the complexity of flavors and textures can be fully satisfying, especially if you are lucky enough to work with the best quality ingredients. There are those of us who love just about any combination of fruit, cheese and nuts in a salad and this one works especially well in the summer when berries are at their peak. While there are not many ingredients here, each component must at it's best to really make it work.

The raspberries add an intriguing floral note to the composition of these ingredients as well as slight acidity that is supported by the vinaigrette. Blackberries or strawberries work equally as well to substitute. The caramelized walnuts are addictive in their own right, so if you are like me, you may want to double or triple the recipe to have extras on hand. They make lovely gifts on their own but can also be tossed into things like fruit crisp, cheesecake crust, sweet potatoes or even just crumbled on top of some thick yogurt for breakfast. I incorporate orange zest into the mix because it is a natural complement to berries and really highlights their flavor. I talk more about this in my recipe for blueberry bran muffins.

You can find several types of feta at the market these days, but I tend to prefer Bulgarian. It is typically made from sheep's milk in the style of Greek feta, but with a creamier consistency and less tang. There is an utterly decadent goat's milk feta on the market produced by Meredith Dairy

out of Australia. Marinated in herbs and olive oil, it is pretty mild in flavor for a goat cheese, but incredibly creamy and rich. If you can get your hands on it, it is worth the splurge.

I recently made this salad as part of a larger meal for an outdoor barbeque. It works beautifully with molasses barbequed pork tenderloin and smoked sweet potato fries. Of course the real hit of the party seemed to be my blood orange sangria, but that probably needs no explaining.