

Summer Salads

By Dan Gill

Growing up on the farm, we always had a full garden and we ate seasonal foods in season. We eagerly looked forward to the first tomato, the first cucumber and the first sweet corn – and consumed them with great gusto and delight. We had no air conditioning then, and summer salads were light and refreshing on a hot, muggy day.

Cucumber Salad: The first of our cool summer salads was simply sliced cucumber and thinly sliced spring onions with vinegar. When the first cucumbers get ripe and before the spring onions get too strong, slice up a big mixed bowl full of both. We have always peeled our cucumbers, but it is purely a matter of preference and variety. In a separate bowl, whisk apple cider vinegar, water, sugar, salt and pepper – all to taste – and pour over to cover. We resist the temptation to add herbs or oils to this, preferring only the clean flavors of the onions, vinegar and cucumbers. Allow this to rest for an hour or so before serving.

Summer Salad: Traditional summer salad with tomato is like gazpacho that you can eat with a fork: Chopped tomatoes, cucumbers (usually peeled), onions and green peppers, or whatever, mixed with mayonnaise, or oil and vinegar, or fruit juice, or whatever, and maybe a smattering of fresh herbs, or seasonings, or jalapeños, or whatever. As the tomatoes ripened, we often had our traditional summer salad mixed with some mayonnaise or *Miracle Whip* (there was no high fructose corn syrup in *Miracle Whip* then) and salt and pepper to taste. There were no measurements, of course. Proportions were determined by what you liked and what you had. Many summer suppers were nothing but a bowl of salad and about a dozen ears of sweet corn – apiece. I am talking about fresh, young, succulent ears of homegrown sweet corn, picked and shucked only after the water comes to a boil – not the “horse corn” that you find in stores.

Sometime in the late 1960’s, Lin and Larry Pardey sailed into Urbanna while working their way around the world on their small cutter, *Seraffyn*. She was only about 24’ on deck, but they sailed her around both capes, though Europe, the Mediterranean, Orient, and Pacific, and back to their starting point in California, all without a motor. From their webpage (www.landlpardey.com): “[*Seraffyn* is the] smallest boat to have circumnavigated contrary to the prevailing winds around all the great southern capes, [and the Pardeys are the] only couple to have circumnavigated both east-about and west-about on boats they built themselves, using traditional means of navigation and having no engine.” While here, Lin and Larry lived in the “little house” on our farm and worked with Joe Conboy building yachts. Larry is a master craftsman, preferring to use chisels and hand tools to shape and finish fine cabinetry. Lin, an accomplished gourmet cook and writer, chronicled their adventures. Their first book, *Cruising in Seraffyn*, quickly became a cult classic among sailing enthusiasts, selling over 50,000 copies in five editions and three languages.

In the book, Lin describes a summer salad with lime juice. At that time, we were living in the old farmhouse with no air conditioning and the lime juice version was even more refreshing than our traditional mayonnaise version. It also has a longer shelf life and is perfect for summer entertaining without concerns of spoilage. Lin and Larry eventually settled in New Zealand but they keep friends apprised of their adventures and sell their books and DVD’s through their website. Lin’s version of summer salad was basically the same as ours above (diced tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, onions, and salt and pepper), but instead of using mayonnaise, she squeezed fresh lime juice over it. Fresh herbs such as basil, dill and parsley add interest and flavor. Allow this to stand at room temperature for at least one half hour before serving.

Corn Salad: Angela is a Valley Girl from California who drifted east and now manages “Something Different”. Her mother was famous for her corn salad. It was a family favorite and she made it for any potluck dinner or picnic. When Angela’s older brother, Eric, was assigned to cook at the White House, he called home to get Mom’s recipe for corn salad and served it to the President. It was a big hit. Several months later, Mom received a newly published White House Cookbook in the mail and found *her* recipe credited to son Eric!

Mom’s Corn Salad, compliments of Angela St. Peter:

Mom always used frozen corn because, after thawing, there was just the right amount of liquid and you could use “just a tad bit” of mayonnaise. It is good made with yellow corn, better with white corn and best with shoe-peg. We use canned shoe-peg (drained of most liquid) for the version we make at the store, but fresh sweet corn, blanched and cut from the cob or even frozen is definitely better:

½ red onion, fine dice

2-3 fresh tomatoes, dice

1 bell pepper, medium dice

2 Lbs. of frozen corn or 3 cans shoepeg corn, drained

1 “Tad bit” of mayonnaise, approximately 1 Tbsp

Salt and pepper to taste. (We use our KA Table Seasoning at the store: a balanced blend of salt, spices and kelp powder.

Zucchini Salad: Sue Higgins is also an excellent cook. She is baking the bread and helping out at the store until she can open her own gourmet shop. Her grandmother was reared on a farm in Alabama, then moved to Richmond and lived to be 103 years old. Sue has made her grandmother’s zucchini salad for the staff several times and everybody loves it. This summer salad only gets better with age and can last for several weeks in the refrigerator. Before zucchini was popular, her grandmother used yellow squash. This is one of the few ways to actually make zucchini palatable: As Sue says “you can eat only so much zucchini bread!”

Finely chop, shred or process:

½ large onion

½ bell pepper

2 stalks celery

Thinly slice 3 young zucchini squash

Whisk together:

¼ cup apple cider vinegar

4 Tbsp red wine vinegar

½ cup sugar

¼ cup vegetable oil (corn, canola or mild olive oil)

¼ cup dry red table wine

Mix all and refrigerate. Liquid should just cover the zucchini.