

Caesar Salad

SERVES 4 TO 6

If you don't own a garlic press, chop the garlic for both the croutons and dressing by hand; sprinkle it with the salt and then continue mincing it until it is almost pureed. The garlic and anchovies in the dressing are optional but strongly recommended.

GARLIC CROUTONS

- 2 large garlic cloves, peeled and pressed through a garlic press
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cups ½-inch white bread cubes (from a baguette or country loaf)

CAESAR SALAD

- 1 large egg
- 3 tablespoons juice from 1 medium lemon
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 8 grindings fresh black pepper
- 1 small garlic clove, pressed (¼ teaspoon)
- 1½ teaspoons anchovy paste or 4 anchovy fillets, minced very fine
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium heads romaine lettuce (large outer leaves removed) or 2 large romaine hearts; washed, dried, and torn into 1½-inch pieces (about 10 cups, lightly packed)
- ⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese

1. **FOR THE CROUTONS:** Adjust oven rack to center position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Mix garlic, salt, and oil in small bowl; set aside for 20 minutes. Spread bread cubes out over small baking sheet. Drizzle oil through fine-mesh strainer evenly onto bread; toss to coat. Bake until golden, about 12 minutes. Cool on baking sheet to room temperature. (Croutons can be stored in airtight container for up to 1 day.)

2. **FOR THE DRESSING:** Bring water to boil in small saucepan over high heat. Carefully lower whole egg into water; cook 45 seconds. Remove with slotted spoon. When cool enough to handle, crack egg into small bowl with all other dressing ingredients except oil; whisk until smooth. Add oil

in slow, steady stream, whisking constantly until smooth. Adjust seasonings. (Dressing may be refrigerated in airtight container for 1 day; shake before using.)

3. To mix the salad: Place lettuce in large bowl; drizzle with half of dressing, then toss to coat lightly. Sprinkle with cheese, remaining dressing, and croutons; toss to coat well. Divide among individual plates; serve immediately.

➤ VARIATIONS

Caesar Salad with Tofu Dressing

This eggless dressing will keep for a week in the refrigerator.

Follow recipe for Caesar Salad, substituting 2 ounces soft tofu, drained and crumbled (about ⅓ cup), for egg. Process dressing ingredients except oil in food processor workbowl fitted with steel blade, scraping down sides as needed, until tofu is incorporated fully and mixture is smooth, about 1 minute. With motor running, add oil in slow, steady stream until smooth.

Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad

SERVES 4 AS MAIN COURSE

Brush two boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about ¾ pound) with 1 tablespoon olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Grill or broil, turning once, until cooked through, about 10 minutes. Cool chicken to room temperature and slice crosswise into ½-inch-wide strips. Follow recipe for Caesar Salad, adding chicken to the salad along with the cheese.

COLESLAW

DESPITE ITS SIMPLICITY, COLESLAW HAS always bothered us for two reasons: the pool of watery dressing that appears at the bottom of the bowl after a few hours, and the salad's sharp flavor, no matter what kind or quantity of vinegar is used. Our slaw always seemed to taste better when we tried it again the next day, but by then the dressing was the consistency of milk.

While most recipes instruct the cook to toss the shredded cabbage immediately with dressing, a few add an extra step. Either the shredded (or merely quartered) cabbage is soaked in ice water for crisping and refreshing, or it is salted, drained, and allowed to wilt.

Cabbage soaked in ice water was crisp, plump, and fresh. If looks were all that mattered, this cabbage would have scored high next to the limp, salted cabbage in the neighboring colander. But its good looks were deceiving. Even though we drained the cabbage and dried it thoroughly, the dressing didn't really adhere. Furthermore, within minutes, the cabbage shreds started to lose their recently acquired water, making for not a small but a large puddle of water to dilute the creamy dressing. The stiff cabbage shreds were strawlike, making them difficult to fork and even more difficult to get into the mouth without leaving a creamy trail.

Quite unlike the ice-water cabbage, the salted shreds lost most of their liquid while sitting in the salt, leaving the cabbage wilted but pickle-crisp. Since the cabbage had already lost most of its own liquid, there was little or no liquid for the salt in the dressing to draw out. We had found the solution to the problem of watery dressing. In addition, we found that this cabbage, having less water in it, took on more of the dressing's flavors, and unlike the stiff, icy shreds, this limp cabbage was also easier to eat.

We did discover that the salting process leaves the cabbage a bit too salty, but a quick rinse washes away the excess salt. After the cabbage has been rinsed, just pat it dry with paper towels and refrigerate until ready to combine it with the dressing. If the coleslaw is to be eaten immediately, rinse it quickly in ice water rather than tap water, then pat it dry. Coleslaw, at least the creamy style, should be served cold.

Having figured out how to keep the cabbage from watering down the dressing, we were ready to tackle the problem of acidity in the dressing. We found a few creamy coleslaw recipes in which the

cabbage was tossed with sour cream only, or a combination of mayonnaise and sour cream—no vinegar. Although we were looking for ways to tone down the tang, a mix of sour cream and mayonnaise proved too mild for our taste. Other recipes called for lemon juice rather than vinegar. Although the lemon juice-flavored coleslaw was pleasantly tart, it lacked the depth that vinegar could offer. We decided to give low-acidity rice wine vinegar a try. We drizzled a bit of rice vinegar over the mayonnaise-tossed cabbage and found its mild acidity to be perfect for coleslaw.

Although there are several styles of coleslaw, the two that follow are classics—one mild and creamy, the other sweet-and-sour. Adjust either recipe to your taste. If sour cream is a must for your creamy slaw, then substitute it for some or all of the mayonnaise. Add green pepper or celery, red onions, or apples. Try caraway seeds or fresh dill, radishes or nuts.



Creamy Coleslaw

SERVES 4

If you like caraway or celery seed in your coleslaw, you can add one-quarter teaspoon of either with the mayonnaise and vinegar. You can shred, salt, rinse, and pat the cabbage dry a day ahead, but dress it close to serving time.

- 1 pound (about ½ medium head) red or green cabbage, shredded fine or chopped (6 cups)
- 1 large carrot, peeled and grated
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt or 1 teaspoon table salt
- ½ small onion, minced
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- Ground black pepper

SCIENCE: Where There's Salt, There's Water

Vegetables that soak in ice water crisp up, while salted and drained vegetables go limp. These phenomena result from the cell structure of most foods, including vegetables. Cells are filled with liquid, but cell walls are semipermeable, allowing liquid to flow into and out of the cell. Depending on where the salt quantity is greater, that's where the water flows.

Cabbage is a pretty tough vegetable, but when soaked in ice water, its shreds become even stiffer and crisper. In this case, the cabbage cells contain more salt than the ice water. The ice water is drawn into the cabbage cells, causing the shreds to plump up. Watching a scored radish blossom into a radish rose when soaked in ice water is an even more dramatic example of this principle.

When shredded cabbage is salted, on the other hand, there is more salt outside the cabbage than there is contained in the cells. The cell water is drawn out by the clinging salt. This partially dehydrated cabbage is limp but still crisp.

1. Toss cabbage and carrots with salt in colander set over medium bowl. Let stand until cabbage wilts, at least 1 hour and up to 4 hours.

2. Dump wilted cabbage and carrots into the bowl. Rinse thoroughly in cold water (ice water if serving slaw immediately). Pour vegetables back into colander, pressing, but not squeezing, them to drain. Pat dry with paper towels. (Can be stored in a zipper-lock bag and refrigerated overnight.)

3. Pour cabbage and carrots back again into bowl. Add onion, mayonnaise, and vinegar; toss to coat. Season with pepper to taste. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.



Sweet-and-Sour Coleslaw

SERVES 4

Since rice wine vinegar tends to mellow, you may want to use cider vinegar if making the slaw a day ahead. The presence of the sugar in this recipe keeps you from having to rinse off salt from the cabbage, as is ordinarily the case.

- 1 pound (about ½ medium head) red or green cabbage, shredded according to illustrations below (6 cups)
- 1 large carrot, peeled and grated
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt or 1 teaspoon table salt
- ¼ teaspoon celery seed
- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ¼ cup rice wine vinegar
- Ground black pepper

1. Toss cabbage and carrots with sugar, salt, and celery seed in colander set over medium bowl. Let stand until cabbage wilts, at least 1 hour and up to 4 hours.

2. Pour draining liquid from bowl; rinse bowl and dry. Dump wilted cabbage and carrots into bowl.

3. Add oil and vinegar; toss to coat. Season with pepper to taste. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve. (Can be refrigerated for 2 days.)

➤ VARIATION

Curried Coleslaw with Apples and Raisins

SERVES 6

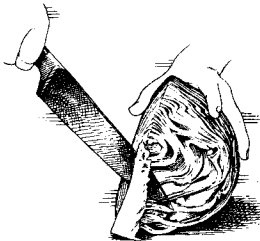
Follow recipe for Sweet-and-Sour Coleslaw, adding 1 teaspoon curry powder, 1 medium apple, peeled and cut into small dice, and ¼ cup raisins (optional) with oil and vinegar.

POTATO SALAD

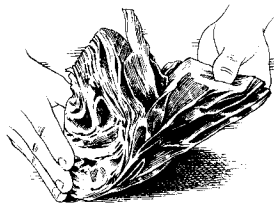
POTATO SALADS COME IN NUMEROUS STYLES. Though recipes may seem dramatically different, most have four things in common—potatoes (of course), fat (usually bacon, olive oil, or mayonnaise); an acidic ingredient to perk things up; and flavorings for distinction. Though these salads may be very different in character, the issues affecting all of them, as it turns out, are much the same.

We first wanted to know what type of potato should be used and how it should be cooked. Recipe writers seemed split down the middle between starchy and waxy potatoes, with starchy praised for being more absorbent and waxy admired for their

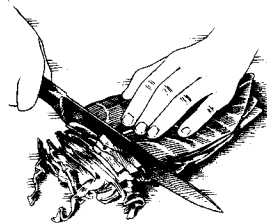
SHREDDING CABBAGE



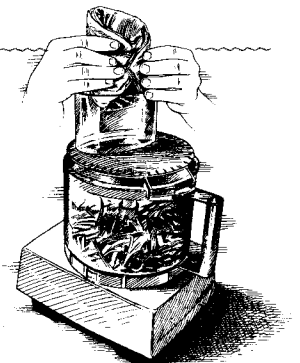
1. Cut a whole head of cabbage into quarters. Remove the piece of the core attached to each quarter.



2. Separate the cabbage quarters into stacks of leaves that flatten when pressed lightly.



3. To shred by hand, use a chef's knife to cut each stack of cabbage diagonally into long, thin pieces.



4. To shred in a food processor (which is best for larger jobs), roll the stacked leaves crosswise to fit them into the feed tube.