

May 22, 2011

Ingredients for Grilled Pineapple Salsa

½ fresh pineapple, peeled, cored and cut into rings

1 red onion, thickly sliced

Olive oil for drizzling

1 jalapeño chili

½ avocado, peeled and diced

1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh mint

Juice of 1 lime

Kosher salt, to taste

Ingredients for Black Bean Salad

For the vinaigrette:

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 Tbs. fresh lime juice

2 Tbs. red wine vinegar

1 Tbs. cumin powder

1 Tbs. chili powder

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. freshly ground pepper

Hot-pepper sauce, to taste

Olive oil for grilling

2 small yellow onions, quartered

2 yellow bell peppers, quartered and seeded

2 red bell peppers, quartered and seeded

2 Anaheim chilies, halved and seeded

2 jalapeño chilies, halved and seeded

2 cans (each 15 oz.) black beans, drained and rinsed

1 bunch fresh cilantro, leaves only, chopped

1 red onion, diced

Whenever guests gather for a grilled meal, their appetites are heightened the moment they catch their first whiff of smoke rising from the fire. The best way to appease their hunger while you finish cooking the main course is to offer up some tasty grilled starters to launch the feast. When you're planning the menu, keep in mind mood, color, flavor and texture, and try to strike a balance among these elements. Pair elegant appetizers with upscale main dishes or choose finger food to begin a backyard barbecue. Cooking starters and sides on the grill will keep the kitchen cool on warm summer evenings.

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Technique Class: On the Grill: Starters and Sides

Tips for the Perfect Barbecue

Chill the drinks: Few things are better than a frosty beer or ice-cold tea, so keep all drinks on ice and in a shady area.

Get great ingredients: Select foods that are in season, such as sweet corn or fresh peaches, and buy locally for the best flavor. When purchasing meat, choose hormone free and organic whenever possible. Seek out a reputable local butcher.

Keep foods fresh: If leaving food out for a long period of time, cover it up with mesh screens to avoid pesky critters and keep out of the sunlight to avoid spoilage. If there is a problem with bugs, set all the food up indoors buffet-style and let guests serve themselves.

Make things comfortable: Be sure to have plenty of seats scattered around the yard so everyone has a place to sit.

Set a casual table: A backyard barbecue doesn't require your best wares, but have enough plates and utensils for everyone. Place serving spoons and forks alongside your serving bowls and platters.

Drink stations: Set up satellite drink stations throughout the backyard. Have one that's alcohol free for the little ones and another with prepared mixed drinks, or a cooler filled with beer, water and ice. This makes it easy for guests to serve themselves and stay hydrated.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *On the Grill*, by Willie Cooper (Oxmoor House, 2009).

The Key to Grilling Vegetables

The high heat of the fire brings out the natural sugars in vegetables while infusing smoke flavor into their flesh, making for delicious eating. Grilling vegetables also keeps their flavors fresh and preserves vitamins and minerals, which can be lost when vegetables are cooked in water.

Select the freshest vegetables available and cook them briefly and simply to conserve their distinctive flavors and nutrients. Watch them closely when grilling, test them for doneness with a sharp knife or skewer (better yet, taste a piece), and take them off the grill the moment they are done.

Grilled Pineapple Salsa

Perked up with jalapeño and fresh mint, this salsa is delicious with chicken legs and meaty fish.

Prepare a hot fire in a grill. Brush and oil the grill grate.

Drizzle the pineapple and onion slices with olive oil, then place on the grill with the jalapeño. Cook the pineapple and onion slices, turning once, until they are grilled marked and heated through, about 8 minutes total. Cook the chili, turning, until charred on all sides.

Transfer the pineapple, onion and chili to a cutting board. Chop the pineapple and onion into chunks and place in a bowl. When the chili is cool enough to handle, peel, stem, seed and dice it, then add it to the bowl. Add the avocado and mint and stir to mix. Add the lime juice, stir again and season with salt.

Use the salsa immediately, or cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days. Bring to room temperature before serving. Makes about 1 cup.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Grill Master*, by Fred Thompson (Weldon Owen, 2011).

Black Bean Salad

This black bean salad is best served when the vegetables are still slightly warm from the grill, or at room temperature within 1 to 2 hours of grilling. The beans and vegetables should be mildly spiced and glistening with the vinaigrette.

To make the vinaigrette, in a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lime juice, vinegar, cumin, chili powder, salt, pepper and a few dashes of hot-pepper sauce.

Prepare a medium-hot fire in a grill. Brush and oil the grill grate or a vegetable-grilling basket.

Brush the yellow onions, bell peppers and chilies with olive oil. Arrange the yellow onions, bell peppers and chilies on the grill or in the vegetable-grilling basket over the hottest part of the fire. Grill, turning occasionally, until well charred on all sides, about 10 minutes total.

Transfer the grilled vegetables to a bowl, cover and let steam for 10 minutes. Pick over the vegetables, removing most of the burned skin but leaving some charred bits. Dice the vegetables to a uniform size and place in a large salad bowl.

Add the black beans, cilantro, red onion and vinaigrette and toss to coat evenly. Serve warm or at room temperature. Serves 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *On the Grill*, by Willie Cooper (Oxmoor House, 2009).

Ingredients for Grilled Romaine Salad

For the Caesar vinaigrette:

¼ cup white wine vinegar

½ tsp. anchovy paste

½ tsp. whole-grain mustard

1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

1 Tbs. fresh oregano

¼ tsp. roasted garlic paste

½ cup canola oil

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 tsp. honey

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

2 heads romaine lettuce, outer leaves removed

Olive oil for drizzling

1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved

1 avocado, pitted, peeled and sliced

¼ lb. Asiago cheese

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¼ lb. Asiago cheese

2 heads romaine lettuce, outer leaves removed

Olive oil for drizzling

1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved

1 avocado, pitted, peeled and sliced

¼ lb. Asiago cheese

Grilled Romaine Salad

Romaine lettuce is both sturdy enough and flavorful enough to stand up to the heat and the char of a grill. Add some avocado and a Caesar-inspired vinaigrette, and you’ve got a grilled salad that belongs alongside a thick, juicy grilled steak.

To make the vinaigrette, in a blender or food processor, combine the vinegar, anchovy paste, mustard, lemon juice, oregano and roasted garlic and pulse to blend. With the machine running, slowly add the canola and olive oils and process until the dressing emulsifies. Transfer to a bowl, stir in the honey, and season with salt and pepper. You should have about 1¼ cups, which is more than you’ll need for this salad; store leftover vinaigrette in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Prepare a medium fire in a grill. Brush and oil the grill grate.

Cut each romaine head in half lengthwise. Trim the base of the stem from each half but leave the remainder of the stem attached; it holds the leaves together. Drizzle the cut side of each half with a little olive oil.

Place the romaine halves, cut side down, on the grill directly over the fire and cook until the leaves develop a little char and have begun to wilt, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn the lettuce over and cook for about 2 minutes more. You want the lettuce to be a little wilted but still hold its shape.

Transfer the romaine halves, cut side up, to individual plates and garnish each plate with one-fourth of the tomatoes and avocado. Using a vegetable peeler, shave the cheese over the salads. Spoon some of the vinaigrette over each salad and serve immediately, passing additional vinaigrette at the table. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Grill Master*, by Fred Thompson (Weldon Owen, 2011).

Grilled Nachos

A firm, aged Mexican cheese, queso añejo is traditionally made from goat’s milk but is most often available made from cow’s milk. The cheese has a sharp, slightly salty taste and is perfect for sprinkling over these nachos just before serving.

In a fry pan over medium heat, warm the oil. Add the chorizo and cook, stirring often, until browned, 6 to 7 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel–lined plate.

Preheat the center burners of a gas grill on low and the outer burners on medium-high for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, assemble the nachos: Place a single layer of tortilla chips on the bottom of a grill tray. Sprinkle one-fourth of the cheddar cheese and then one-fourth of the Monterey jack cheese on top. Place several spoonfuls of refried beans on the cheese. Sprinkle one-fourth of the chorizo and then one-fourth of the jalapeño slices on top. Repeat with the remaining ingredients to create 3 more layers, making each layer slightly narrower than the previous one so the nachos resemble a pyramid-shaped mound.

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Place the tray over the center burners on the grill, close the lid and cook for about 7 minutes. Turn off the center burners, keeping the outer burners on medium-high, and continue cooking, covered, until the top layers of cheese are bubbly and the bottom layers are evenly melted, about 3 minutes more.

Remove the tray from the grill and top the nachos with the tomatoes, cilantro and *queso añejo* cheese. Serve immediately with guacamole, salsa and sour cream on the side. Serves 10 to 12.

Williams-Sonoma Kitchen

Grilled Gazpacho

Grilling the vegetables for a cold gazpacho adds an unexpected depth of flavor. This summer soup tastes best when prepared a day in advance, refrigerated overnight to meld the flavors together and finished with fresh herbs at the table.

Core, quarter and seed the plum and heirloom tomatoes. Place the tomatoes in a colander over a bowl and sprinkle with salt. Let stand for 10 minutes. Transfer the water drained from the tomatoes to a sealed container, cover and refrigerate.

Prepare a medium-hot fire in a grill. Brush and oil the grill grate or a vegetable-grilling basket.

Brush the zucchini, tomatoes, bell peppers and chilies with olive oil, and lightly season with salt and pepper.

Working in batches, arrange the zucchini, tomatoes, bell peppers and chilies on the grate or in the basket over the hottest part of the fire. Grill, turning frequently, until soft and nicely charred on all sides, 2 to 4 minutes total for the zucchini and 10 minutes total for the tomatoes, bell peppers and chilies.

Transfer the grilled vegetables to a platter and let cool slightly. Pick over the vegetables, removing most of the burned skin but leaving some charred bits.

Working in batches, in a blender or food processor, combine the grilled vegetables, half of the cucumbers and the hot-pepper sauce and process until pureed. Add ½ cup of the tomato soup or more as needed to thin the puree to a pourable consistency. Taste and adjust the seasonings; the gazpacho should be highly seasoned and spicy. Transfer to a glass pitcher, cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or preferably overnight.

To serve, fill individual clear shot glasses or espresso cups three-fourths full with the gazpacho. In a small bowl, stir together the chives, chervil, parsley and tarragon. Top each serving with 1 tsp. of the remaining cucumbers, 1 Tbs. of the reserved tomato water, 3 drops extra-virgin olive oil and a pinch of the herbs. Serve immediately. Serves 8 to 10.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *On the Grill*, by Willie Cooper (Oxmoor House, 2009).

Ingredients for Grilled Gazpacho

6 plum tomatoes

4 heirloom tomatoes

Salt, to taste

Olive oil for brushing

2 small zucchini, sliced lengthwise into strips ¼ inch thick

2 red bell peppers, halved lengthwise and seeded

2 jalapeño chilies, halved lengthwise and seeded

Freshly ground pepper, to taste

2 English cucumbers, peeled, seeded and chopped

1 Tbs. hot-pepper sauce

½ cup tomato soup, plus more as needed

1 Tbs. chopped fresh chives

1 Tbs. chopped fresh chervil

1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 Tbs. chopped fresh tarragon

Extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling