



Salad days

The long, hot days of summer really see salads come into their own – light, tasty meals, quickly put together and perfect for fine weather dining. Food writer **Jenny Linford** explains what makes them so special, and why the Trust does them so well





What makes salads so versatile and delicious is the way you assemble and dress them. Make the best ingredient the focus

is a way of maintaining genetic diversity,' says Rob. 'The typical salad that you buy from a supermarket contains a lot of water, and is often imported from abroad.'

Growing your own salad vegetables, of course, offers you the chance to experience truly fresh salad. 'Don't sow your lettuces too thickly,' recommends Philip. 'Space them well as it makes them much easier to thin out.'

Dressing up

What makes salads so versatile and delicious is the way you assemble and dress them. 'I worked as a chef at Clumber Park from 2007 to 2012, and I'd often pick one ingredient which was at its best and make it the focus of the salad,' says Clive. 'So for a beetroot salad, I'd use Chioggia, the stripy one, and golden beets, then contrast their earthy, sweet flavour with bitter leaves, say radicchio, or peppery rocket. Or, I'd make a tomato salad, using a number of different varieties. There's a dark-skinned variety called Black Russian which has a smoky-bacon flavour that goes well with cherry tomatoes.'

For added appeal, use fresh herbs. Try tomatoes with basil, marjoram or tarragon, or fresh peas with mint. Nuts, seeds, fruits and grains add texture. Or you can liven things up by experimenting with dressings. Use the

Summer is a great time to be making salads, and with a bit of imagination and care they can taste wonderful. The National Trust looks after 140 properties with their own kitchen gardens, so if you're paying a visit this summer you'll be able to enjoy salads in the cafés made from produce picked that same morning.

'There's so much available to use,' says Clive Goudercourt, the National Trust's Development Chef. 'To me, a salad should be made using seasonal, fresh ingredients at their best, and be full of flavour. What could be nicer than heading into one of our cafés and seeing an array of beautiful, fresh salads? You've walked around the kitchen gardens, seen those tomatoes and lettuces growing, and there they are in salads, ready for you to eat.'

Those kitchen gardens have a history that's as much a part of the places we look after as the buildings. In previous decades, many were converted to other uses, but now they are being returned to their historic purpose.

'Many of our country houses were historically set up to be as self-sufficient as possible, so you find many walled gardens for productive horticulture,' explains Rob Macklin, Head of Food and Farming for the Trust. 'They extended the seasons through sensible design, such as having garden walls that captured heat from the sun and made the growing season longer. It's lovely to see the potential being unlocked from these gardens.'

Wherever you are, you'll be able to see fine examples of kitchen gardens at our properties. A lot of hard work goes into running and maintaining them, with careful planning required on the planting front. 'We have regular meetings with the kitchen here to discuss what their requirements are and tell them what's ready,' explains Philip Whaites, Head Gardener at Wimpole, Cambridgeshire.

Meanwhile, at Clumber Park, Nottinghamshire, Gardener Hazel Robinson is proud that the garden keeps the café there in salad all year round. 'We grow traditional butterhead lettuces; we've got one variety called Fat Lazy Blonde! In the winter we grow hardier plants like spinach, chard and kale. We've got an outdoor cucumber called Crystal Lemon, which looks like a little, round, yellow, prickly apple. Visitors love it because it looks so different.'

Many National Trust gardeners make a point of growing heritage, or heirloom, varieties, citing their excellent flavour as part of their appeal. Heritage varieties have been cultivated the old-fashioned way by saving seeds from the best plants and building up flavour and texture over generations. 'Growing heritage salad varieties

Top left Home-grown salad: rewarding and so delicious.

Above left From plot to crate: a gardener laden with fresh produce destined for the café at Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire.

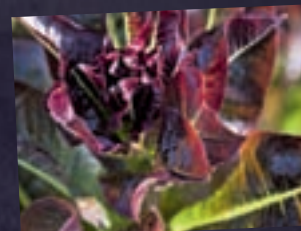
Above The geometric planting of green and red varieties of lettuce in the 19th-century walled kitchen garden at Trengwainton, Cornwall, shows how a kitchen garden can be both productive and attractive.

GROWING YOUR OWN

Try some different varieties of old favourites for a personalised approach to your own summer salad

LETTUCES

A salad staple, there are many varieties to choose from. When growing lettuces, water them well to promote fast growth, so ensuring tender leaves.



ROCKET

Very vigorous and easy to grow, rocket adds a peppery note to the salad bowl. Combine with cherry tomatoes and an olive oil and balsamic vinegar dressing.



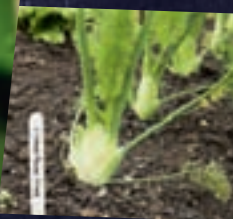
TOMATOES

Look out for interesting heritage varieties such as Black Russian, which is dark brown with a distinctive flavour, or Mortgage Lifter, a huge beefsteak tomato.



RED PEPPERS

With their eye-catching, vivid colour, peppers brighten up salads and add crunchiness. Usually grown in greenhouses, they thrive in warm, sheltered spots.



CUCUMBERS

I love cucumbers for their refreshing taste and texture. Grow them in greenhouses or outdoors, in a sunny, sheltered spot. Burpless Tasty Green is good variety.

FENNEL

These white bulbs have a liquorice flavour and are firm and crunchy. Classically, they are finely chopped and combined with orange slices for a tasty salad.



Above right A young gardener watering beans on the Community Allotments at Minnowburn, County Down, where more experienced growers (top) are always on hand to pass on tips and advice.

classic ratio of three parts oil to one part acid (vinegar or lemon juice), seasoned with salt and pepper. To that base, you can add in flavourings such as fiery English mustard or horseradish, or natural yoghurt or crème fraîche for a creamy texture.

When it comes to adding a touch of sweetness to your dressing, Clive recommends honey. 'Find a local honey producer,' he says. 'I do think, where we can, we should eat the food that grows in and on the ground we walk on.'

Make sure your leaves are dry before you dress them, or you'll dilute the dressing. Use a salad spinner, or wrap the leaves in a clean tea towel to remove excess water.

Finally, do remember to only dress the salad just before serving. 'You want it to look fresh, bright and vibrant,' says Clive. 'It should be something beautiful that you really want to eat.'

To get you started, why not try Clive's Tuna Niçoise recipe over the page? You'll also be able to enjoy it in our cafés over the summer. ➡➡



Jenny Linford is a freelance food writer and author of several books including *The Creamery Kitchen* and *Food Lovers' London*.

Find out more

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/kitchengardens
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/greengardening



FRESH AND FAST

Hanbury Hall's Neil Cook explains why he finds it so satisfying to grow salad the organic way



'We have two vegetable gardens here at Hanbury Hall – a formal vegetable garden (above) and a walled garden, which is certified organic. When it comes to salad crops,

we've learnt that it's important to plant small batches regularly. We rotate crops to prevent pests and diseases from building up and to stop robbing the soil of nutrients that particular plants use up. It's great to follow beans and peas with lettuces, because the legumes root nitrogen into the soil and this gives the green growth that you want for lettuces. Gardening organically is about caring for the soil and that makes you care for the wildlife, too.

When it comes to slugs and snails, I've found using nematodes effective. You have to plan ahead and make sure that you use them when the soil is at the right temperature so that you don't waste your money. Slug traps, like a grapefruit turned upside down or beer, will get rid of some. Planting calendulas attracts insects such as hoverflies into the garden, which keep aphids down.

When you grow salad yourself, you have the satisfaction of getting something from your garden as fresh as it can be. You can pick it and eat it within minutes; you'll never get it that fresh from the supermarket. You can pick your salad at the size you want and at the stage you want. It's a great way of showing off, too!



Clive Goudercourt, our Development Chef, shares the recipe for one of his favourite classic salads

SERVES 6

Ingredients

150g/5oz French beans, topped and tailed
100g/3oz red onion, peeled and sliced
400g/14oz tomatoes, cut into wedges
350g/12oz new potatoes, boiled and cut into wedges
70g/2oz black olives
Small handful of torn basil leaves
Small handful torn flat-leaf parsley
Small bunch of chives, cut on the diagonal
80ml/3 fl oz extra virgin rapeseed oil
10ml/2 tbsp red wine vinegar
Juice of half a lemon
Salt and freshly ground pepper
150g/5oz mixed summer lettuce leaves
6 eggs, hard boiled, shelled and cut into wedges
500g/1lb 2oz pole-and-line caught canned tuna, drained of oil or brine
30g/1oz anchovy fillets in oil (optional)
Crusty bread, to serve

Method

- 1) Steam or boil the French beans for 2–3 minutes until just softened. Remove from the pan and refresh in a bowl of iced water to stop the cooking process, so retaining colour and texture. Pat dry.
- 2) In a large bowl, toss together the red onion, tomatoes, French beans, new potatoes, olives, basil, parsley and chives until combined.
- 3) Make a dressing by placing the oil, vinegar and lemon juice in a jar and shaking well to combine. Season with salt and freshly ground pepper.

To serve

Place the lettuce leaves in a large serving dish. Top with the herbed tomato mixture, then the hard-boiled egg wedges. Flake the tuna over the top, then drizzle over the dressing and, if using, garnish with chopped anchovies. Alternatively, for six individual servings, layer the ingredients in the same order but dividing them among six plates. Serve with crusty bread.



Clive says: Most of the ingredients for this salad are grown in our National Trust kitchen gardens. Do choose responsibly sourced tuna that is pole-and-line caught. Try using Black Russian tomatoes, as they add a lovely smoky flavour to this salad, or use cherry tomatoes cut in half. If you can find them, purple or yellow varieties of French beans make for a talking point.