

*The Introduction to All Great Meals:*  
*Salad Dressing & Vinaigrette*



The rewards of foods that you prepare, that you slowly dine upon, and linger over in your days and nights are unmatched. Take a break from the rush of things and find yourself in the foods you make. We are what and how we eat, so be your best in expressing a love of life.

I usually like to present a recipe that showcases one of the dynamic aspects of a World Cuisine entrée for the home cook, and in particular an entrée that is exotic, romantic, and is easy to prepare. This time around though I have something different in mind. Salad dressings! I hope you have fun with these dressings, and find the little bit of time that they require to make.

Why? Today, my girlfriend said that while she was at the grocery store she bought a bottle of Honey Mustard dressing as she was craving a sweet and spicy salad. She ate two salads while I was at work. She didn't tell me until the next day because she knew the lecture would come about that we have honey, three kinds of mustard, five kinds of vinegar, and four different kinds of oil in the kitchen. I can't blame her. It's so easy to pay the extra money to follow our basest inspirations, especially while standing in front of a set of shelves with hundreds of variations on blue cheese, ranch, French, mustard and oil and vinegar dressings while grocery shopping. I've done it. I can't resist blue cheeses. Dressings have dairy or eggs. Vinaigrettes have mustards, herbs, or oil as the thickening agents. Dressings are heavier, and vinaigrettes are light (sometimes).

The finer variations become quite expensive when you break it down to a per salad cost of eating at home. Salads are supposed to be fun, nutritious, fresh, and contain the ability to either make us hungrier, or to calm our hunger with the right combination of ingredients. Salads and salad dressings run the whole spectrum of dining, as they can be crunchy, soft, spicy, creamy, tart, sweet, meaty, fruity, and in some cases as part of an entrée as in being a base for seafood, grilled meats, or fried tofu. So here it is, four salad dressings, and one salad composted of sautéed wild mushrooms. It's the best way that I can think of to give a big welcome to the fresh spring season that is upon us these days.

Each recipe makes about a quart of dressing. They will all keep for a couple of weeks in the refrigerator except for the Arugula Feta Dressing, which only lasts a week because of the life span of the buttermilk. These are home made, and fresh, not processed and enriched with sugars, preservatives and then pasteurized. It's good to know what is in your food.

Other oils that are not used but are great in salad dressings are: walnut oil, grape seed oil, truffle oil, and sesame oil. Explore every vinegar you find.

## WASABI VINAIGRETTE

1 cup	corn oil
1 cup	extra virgin olive oil
2 bulbs	fresh shallot ( <i>this equal 2 tablespoons</i> )
2 tablespoons	wasabi powder, or 3 tablespoons wasabi paste
¼ cup	cooked rice, soft ( <i>jasmine or nishiki is best</i> )
½ cup	fresh orange juice with the pulp
1/3 cup	honey
¼ cup	rice wine vinegar ( <i>preferably Mirin</i> )
¼ cup	soy sauce
1 tablespoon	white sesame seeds
1 tablespoon	orange zest ( <i>this is the grated orange part of the skin</i> )

Place chopped shallot, rice and wasabi in food processor. Turn machine on and slowly add the corn oil. After the oil add honey, then orange juice, soy, and vinegar. Now blend in the olive oil. Mix until it is emulsified. Chill.

If you prefer the dressing to be thicker just add a tablespoon of sour cream at the beginning. I use soft cooked sushi rice to thicken mine. It tastes better.

If you don't want rice as your thickener then use sour cream, or 3 egg yolks.

This dressing is good with seafood, or with fruit in addition to wild greens for the salad.

## PISTACHIO FETA AND ARUGULA DRESSING

1/3 cup	pistachiosq
2 ounces	fresh arugula
6 ounces	feta cheese
1 tablespoon	chopped garlic
1 cup	sour cream
1 cup	buttermilk
3/4 teaspoon	kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon	ground black pepper

Cream the pistachios, arugula, feta cheese and garlic together. Then add the sour cream. Slowly pour in the buttermilk. Add salt and pepper. That's it!

This dressing is good with romaine and iceberg lettuce salads that include things like avocado, grilled or fresh vegetables, and dried fruits.

## AN ACRE OF BLISS

Standing in the back yard  
Between the mud and the daffodils,  
Tapping the thin spine of a rose hips bush,  
Dog digs another hole  
In her hunt for the elusive gopher,  
And I wonder if it's worth it  
To clean out the koi pond,  
To begin the mania of early planting  
And spreading around more wild flower seeds,  
And then it hits, a fit of shelter shock,  
This thing that strikes at the heart  
Of meditations in the shade,  
When I know the home needs me,

There's dinner to prepare,  
The yard wants for my design,  
And all I want to do is study  
The cracks in dried oak leaves,  
To track the ridges of red clay  
Beneath the English ivy.  
And the ivy wins.  
Today the home is on its own.  
And me, I'm hidden in the raw sienna  
Shades of spring turning green,  
Where no government, no ideal,  
No bill nor need to repair can touch me.  
Today the warm sun is simply warm,  
And that's enough for me.

## BASIL POBLANO VINAIGRETTE

2	poblano peppers, roasted, seeded and peeled
1 ounce	fresh basil
2 teaspoons	fried basil
¼ cup	Gulden's mustard
2 cups	corn oil or soy oil
1-1/2 cups	olive oil ( <i>second press olive oil, not extra virgin</i> )
1 cup	apple cider vinegar
1 tablespoon	brown sugar
1 teaspoon	kosher salt

Rub a little corn oil on the peppers, put on roasting pan, and roast in your oven for 20 minutes at 375 degrees. Remove and immediately put them in a plastic container, seal the top with the plastic wrap and let them set for about 45 minutes. Then, fill the container with cold water and gently peel the skin off of the peppers. It's not easy the first time, so take it easy and make sure that you preserve the flesh of the pepper. All you want to throw away are the seeds and blistered skin.

Put the poblano pepper, basil and mustard into the food processor. Puree.

Mix the oils together and then slowly blend into the peppers. It will get pretty thick and that's OK. Then add the brown sugar and salt. The last step is to slowly blend in the apple cider vinegar. It will not be thick, but it will be smooth and spicy! This vinaigrette is good with any kind of salad, and is one of my favorites.

## GEORGIA PEACH HONEY MUSTARD DRESSING

And now the culprit of it all, but because we're in the South, and because I just think it's a great twist on the ordinary. You can use peach preserves, peach juice, a peach, or peach puree, even frozen peaches.

½ cup	grain mustard
1 cup	salad oil
1 cup	olive oil
1/3 cup	red wine vinegar
1	shallot
1 cup	peach ( <i>if you don't have fresh or frozen then use a half a cup of peach preserves</i> )
1/3 cup	honey
2/3 teaspoon	kosher salt
½ teaspoon	ground white pepper
1 tablespoon	chopped parsley
½ teaspoon	mustard seed

Mix all ingredients together, and then blend in food processor, or with a hand held blender (sometimes called a burr mixer). If you are just in a hurry for the honey mustard taste then mix a cup of honey with two and a half cups Dijon mustard, and a third of a cup of a sweet vinegar. Of course this dressing is good on anything, or at least that was what I was told earlier today!

## SHIITAKE AND PORTOBELLA MUSHROOMS SHANGHAI STYLE

This is an easy sauté with lots of flavor. When I was in Shanghai I had a different variation on this dish in every restaurant, and all were good. This is my favorite because it pushes the flavors of the mushrooms out to the front. If you want to spice it up some just add a quarter teaspoon ground white pepper. Other variations are to add water chestnuts, whole red chili peppers, or lotus bulbs. If you have ever had fresh water chestnuts and fresh lotus bulbs, then you will know why I suggest them as they are a couple of the best things I have ever eaten in combination with wild mushrooms. This recipe is also good with Chinese Straw mushrooms. If you can't find them fresh, it is OK to buy the canned ones, just make sure you drain and rinse them.

We bring it to the table today as an accompaniment to romaine with the Basil Poblano Vinaigrette.

3 ounces	corn oil or soy oil
1 tablespoon	fresh ginger, minced
1 tablespoon	fresh garlic, minced
6 ounces	shiitake mushrooms, thick sliced
6 ounces	portobella mushrooms, thin sliced
4 ounces	water chestnuts ( <i>I've seen them fresh at Wal-Mart!</i> )
2 tablespoons	raw sugar ( <i>turbinado</i> )
1/3 cup	soy sauce
¼ cup	Chinese cooking wine or Mirin ( <i>Japanese vinegar</i> )
2 tablespoons	fresh cilantro, rough chopped

Heat oil in large sauté pan on medium high heat until oil begins to turn clear. This is about 1 minute. Add garlic and ginger and cook for 30 seconds.

Add mushrooms, in small increments so that you do not bring the pan temperature down too quickly. Stir as you go. Cook mushrooms for 2 minutes.

They will steam and shrink up a little bit. Add sugar so that it covers all of the mushrooms. Add soy sauce and cook for another minute. Remember, toss and stir the pan around the whole time you are cooking, and keep temperature on medium high heat. Add fresh cilantro and cook for another 30 seconds.

Wash one head of romaine lettuce, and then tear it with your hands into three-inch sections. Split between two plates. Pour two ounces of the Basil Poblano Vinaigrette over the salad, and then divide the hot mushroom mix over the greens. If you need cheese then grate fresh Parmesan or an aged Swiss cheese over the salads.



Award-Winning chef, and culinary poet, Lamar Thomas, has contributed this month's recipe, which can be found in his soon to be published book, *Ginger, Lily, and Sweet Fire: A Romance with Food*. To experience Thomas' world class cuisine visit him at the East West Bistro in Downtown Athens.