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Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

To appreciate the flavour and goodness of cold-pressed olive oil, use it raw as much as possible and add it to cooked dishes at the last minute just before serving. Simmering at low heat for a short time is fine.

Basic Lemon-Olive Oil Bread Dip

Tasting our extra-virgin Greek olive oil for the first time? Try this simple blend of ingredients for a quick snack at any time or appetizer. Your senses will thank you for it.

In a shallow dish splash olive oil, a squeeze or two of fresh lemon juice and pinch of sea salt. Whisk together with a fork and plunge in with freshly baked bread, toasted baguette or crusty roll. Pairs well with olives, wine and cheese. Lemon and olive oil are inseparable in Greek cuisine. The two go very well together because their enzymes bring out the best of flavours in each one. Even though lemon tastes tangy, it is actually alkaline forming in the body. This is very beneficial in reducing excess stomach acid and aiding digestion. Lemon combined with oil is also a natural liver cleanse.

Tangy Oil and Lemon Dressing

Apart from basic lemon-oil and vinaigrette, this is the most commonly used dressing in Greek cuisine. It makes baked potatoes, chicken, fish and lamb mouth watering. It is a must for green salads and steamed vegetables. You may vary the quantity of oil and lemon to suit your taste.

¼ cup olive oil (60 ml);
juice of ½ a lemon, strained
½ tsp salt (2 ml);
¼ tsp pepper (1 ml);
1 tsp dried oregano (5 ml)
1 minced garlic clove

Whisk all the ingredients together in a bowl. It's that simple! In addition to green salads, use it as a marinade for raw vegetables, barbequed meats and fish. **Option:** Replace oregano with mint, dill, marjoram, rosemary, or basil. If fresh herbs, double the quantity.

Tzadziki (Cucumber and Yogurt Dip/ Salad)

This dip goes well with broiled/barbequed chicken, lamb, beef or pork. If served as a salad, the cucumber should be sliced thin instead of grated. Tzadziki is the traditional Greek spread served on pita-bread rolled sandwiches. Approximately 3 cups

2 ½ cups yogurt (750 ml)
½ an English cucumber, peeled, grated and squeezed dry
½ bunch of dill, chopped fine
2 cloves garlic, minced
¼ cup olive oil (60 ml),
1 tbsp white vinegar (15 ml)
salt and white pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients and stir well. Chill for a few hours before serving. Garnish with olives. To make the dip thicker substitute ½ cup of yogurt with sour cream.



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Greek Village Salad

This salad is best when local garden vegetables are available.

Serves 4

4 medium tomatoes, cored and cut into wedges
1 English cucumber, peeled, cubed or sliced
1 red/green bell pepper, sliced into thin rings
1 small cooking onion, sliced thin, or
2 green onions, tops included, chopped
1 garlic clove minced (optional)
2 tbsp red wine vinegar (30 ml)
¼ cup olive oil (60 ml); 1 tsp oregano (5 ml),
½ tsp salt (2 ml)
4 oz feta cheese cut into ½" cubes, or coarsely crumbled (115 g)
handful of Kalamata olives

In a small bowl, whisk together olive oil, vinegar, garlic, salt, and oregano. Set aside. Put tomatoes, cucumber, pepper, and onions in a salad bowl, toss gently. Drizzle with dressing, toss again gently. Top with feta cheese and olives.

Variations: Replace oregano with a handful of fresh basil leaves torn into pieces by hand. Basil turns black if cut with a knife. Add sliced boiled eggs, anchovy fillets and bite-sized pieces of romaine lettuce.

Lentil Soup

A steamy bowl of lentil soup will satisfy the heartiest appetite. In Greece, soups are a meal in themselves. Serve with croutons, or toasted bread and finish with a tbsp of olive oil.

Serves up to 8

2 cups lentils (soaked overnight) (500 ml); 1 large onion, diced
2 stalks celery, strings removed, diced; 1 carrot, diced
2 tbsp olive oil (30 ml)
¼ cup red wine vinegar (optional) (60 ml)
salt and pepper to taste;
½ tsp dry dill (2 ml)
1 tbsp tomato paste (15 ml)
2 bay leaves; ¼ tsp nutmeg (1 ml); 1 tsp marjoram, rosemary or savory (5 ml)
2 large tomatoes, skinned, cored, and coarsely chopped
about 2 quarts water or beef broth (2 l)
1 beef bouillon cube (optional), if no broth available

Cover lentils with water and let stand overnight. Discard water. In casserole, add oil, onions, beef cube, bay leaves and ladle full of water. Cook over medium heat until onions are transparent. Stir in carrot and celery, continue cooking and adding water to prevent ingredients from sticking or burning. Add lentils and continue cooking for five minutes adding water as needed to prevent ingredients from sticking. Add seasonings, vinegar, tomato, and one litre of broth. Bring to a gentle boil for 5 minutes, add remainder of broth and then let simmer for 20 minutes, or until lentils are tender but not mushy. Soup is always best the next day.



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Bruschetta

Italian crusty bread or French baguette, cut in half lengthwise
large garlic clove
olive oil
2 large tomatoes, thinly sliced or 14 oz (398 g) canned tomato chunks
2 or three sprigs of fresh basil
¼ tsp salt (1 ml)
¼ tsp pepper (1 ml)

Set the oven to 375°F (190°C), toast the bread lightly, remove and rub with garlic while still hot. For more flavour, spread finely chopped or crushed garlic on cut-side of bread. Top with sliced/chunk tomatoes and shredded fresh basil. Drizzle generously with olive oil. Return bread to oven for 5 minutes. Slice and serve hot.

Variations: For a cheese- garlic bruschetta, sprinkle some shredded mozzarella or parmesan cheese before placing back in the oven. The basic recipe may also be enhanced with additional toppings such as olives, feta cheese, prosciutto ham, cooked Italian sausage, marinated artichoke slices, chopped fresh peppers, anchovies, sun-dried tomatoes in oil, mushrooms or fine salami.

Hummus (chickpea dip)

Hummus is easy to prepare and should be chilled overnight to let all the flavours meld. It is a must for pot-luck lunches, barbecues, and picnics.

Makes 2-3 cups
19 oz can (approx. 500 ml) cooked plain chickpeas, drained
4 tbsp tahini (sesame-seed paste) (60 ml)
juice of 1/2 lemon, strained; 4 tbsp olive oil (60 ml)
2 garlic cloves, minced; salt to taste
2-3 sprigs parsley or coriander
few black olives for garnish

Mix all ingredients except olives in a food processor to make a smooth and thick purée. Refrigerate at least one hour before serving. Garnish with black olives. Serve with pita bread, raw vegetable sticks, nacho or potato chips

How to cook Pasta

Don't skimp on the water. Use a large cooking pot and add lots of water to ensure the pasta cooks quickly and evenly. Add some salt, but never oil to the water. Add the pasta when the water is at a roaring boil, stir frequently and uncovered to avoid foaming and spilling. Follow the minimum time of cooking as instructed on the package. Regular hard-wheat pasta will cook in about 8 to 11 minutes. Egg pasta takes less time. Test for doneness by biting into a strand of pasta gently. It is done "al dente" when you bite all the way through the strand without it being dry and hard at the core nor mushy. Drain the pasta. Do not run under cold water. Do not oil the pasta before adding sauce. The oil coating will not make the sauce adhere to the pasta. After the pasta is drained, pour it into your skillet of sauce and toss thoroughly, adding grated cheese. Or, serve a portion directly in a dish and add the sauce and grated cheese on top. Drizzle with olive oil as a finish.

Leftover pasta is delicious: warm it up in the oven, uncovered, and drizzle with olive oil.



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Pasta with fresh Sage

This is a savoury quick and easy starter.

Serves 4

pasta portioned and cooked according to package instructions

2 tbsp. butter (30 ml)

¼ cup olive oil (60 ml)

12 fresh sage leaves, whole

1 garlic clove, crushed

¼ tsp white pepper (2 ml)

grated Parmesan cheese

It takes less time to make the sauce than it takes to boil the pasta. It is essential to keep the heat low when preparing this sauce. Simmering is key to successfully melding the flavours. In a skillet over low heat, bring to a simmer butter, olive oil and garlic. Add fresh sage leaves, continue to simmer, stirring frequently for 3-4 minutes. Turn heat off, discard sage leaves. Drain pasta, pour into skillet, tossing well and adding ½ tsp white pepper and Parmesan cheese to taste. Serve hot.