

Romaine Salad with Chicken, Cheddar, Apple, and Spiced Pecans

Serves 4

While we prefer our own Quick Spiced Pecans (see related recipe) in this salad, store-bought spiced pecans taste fine, too. Raspberry vinegar gives this dressing a distinct fruity flavor; however, red wine vinegar can be substituted. If you don't have cranberry juice on hand, water can be used instead. If the dressing seems too thick, thin it out with additional cranberry juice or water.

Prep Time: 30 min

Cook Time: N/A

INGREDIENTS

Vinaigrette

1/4 cup cranberry juice (see note)
1/4 cup dried cranberries
1/4 cup raspberry vinegar
1 small shallot, peeled and quartered
2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1 small garlic clove, peeled
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salad

1 large head romaine lettuce, torn into bits (about 10 cups)
8 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1 Granny Smith apple, cored and sliced thin
1 cup spiced pecans (see Related Recipe)
1/2 small red onion, sliced thin
1/4 cup dried cranberries
2 cups shredded or sliced cooked chicken

METHOD

For the vinaigrette: Combine the cranberry juice and dried cranberries in a microwave-safe bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and microwave on high until hot, about 1 minute. Puree the hot cranberry mixture, vinegar, shallot, thyme, mustard, garlic, salt, and pepper in a blender until the shallot and garlic are finely chopped, about 15 seconds. With the blender running, add the oil and continue to process until smooth and emulsified, about 15 seconds. (The dressing can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 24 hours. Bring to room temperature and whisk to recombine before using.)

For the salad: Toss the lettuce, cheddar, apple, pecans, onion, and dried cranberries with 3/4 cup of the vinaigrette. Divide the salad among individual plates. Place the shredded chicken in the bowl used to dress the lettuce, and toss with 1/4 cup of the dressing. Divide the dressed chicken evenly among the plates, arranging it on the lettuce. Serve, passing the remaining dressing separately.

Recipe courtesy America's Test Kitchen, Published February 12, 2008.

Quick Spiced Pecans

Makes 2 cups

These nuts can be stored in a zipper-lock bag at room temperature for up to 1 week. If adding to a salad, be sure to shake off any extra sugar first.

Prep Time: 5 min

Cook Time: 10 min

INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
1/8 teaspoon ground allspice
2 cups pecan halves
1 tablespoon sugar

METHOD

Melt the butter in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-low heat. Stir in the salt, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and allspice, followed by the pecans. Toast the nuts, stirring often, until the color of the nuts deepens slightly, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer the nuts to a bowl and toss with the sugar. Spread the coated nuts on a plate to cool.

Recipe courtesy America's Test Kitchen, Published February 12, 2008.