

Green Salad with asparagus, fennel and cucumber

This classic salad is a hit with any dish as the bold flavours hold their own. You can keep it really simple or tart it up a little with the addition of blanched asparagus, freshly shaved fennel, pine nuts and/ or sesame seeds for a little textural enlightenment. It is simple and can mostly be prepared ahead so you won't be dragged away from your dinner guests.

Ingredients

(serves 6)

Salad

200g leafy greens
1 firm but ripe Bosc pear (when in season)
Small bulb fennel
50g piece fresh parmesan
1 bunch asparagus
1 Lebanese cucumber
2 tablespoons sesame seeds

Dressing

4 Tablespoons good Olive Oil
1 tablespoon caramelised red wine vinegar
2 teaspoons white wine vinegar
3 teaspoons dijon mustard
1 teaspoon honey
1 tablespoon water to thin
Small Pinch sea salt

freshly cracked black pepper

Method

1. Wash and dry salad leaves as soon as you bring them home from the shops. Pluck off long stems. Store in plastic bag in fridge.
2. Combine dressing ingredients in a jar and shake vigorously until creamy. Can be made a day ahead and stored in the fridge. Remove at least an hour before needed as it will solidify a little.
3. For the asparagus, boil a couple of inches of water in a deep frying pan. Snap the ends off the asparagus and once the water is boiling, add the asparagus. Simmer for 30 seconds or so and once bright green transfer to a colander and run under cold running water until completely cool to stop the cooking process. Wrap in a fresh clean cloth and store in the fridge until needed.
4. Using a good potato peeler or a mandolin, carefully shave parmesan into longish strips/ curls. Store in airtight container in the fridge until needed.
5. Using a mandolin or very sharp knife, shave fennel. Store in an airtight container until needed.
6. Watching like a hawk, dry fry sesame seeds in a small frying pan over medium heat OR roast in oven. Set the timer for 5 minutes, check, shake and set again. (These can be roasted well in advance and kept in a jar in the pantry for a couple of weeks.)
7. Slice pear just before making salad or prep in advance and brush with lemon juice. Quarter, core and slice thinly lengthways. Place in airtight container in the fridge.
8. To assemble salad, cut the asparagus into halves or thirds, depending on length. Arrange $\frac{3}{4}$ ingredients in layers in a large shallow bowl. Ensure that you reserve some attractive pieces to pop on the top to garnish.
9. Shake dressing and spoon over 2 tablespoons, gently combine with salad.
10. Garnish with remaining ingredients and drizzle with a little more dressing. Take remaining dressing to the table in a little jug