

The Latest

Happy Thanksgiving!



Even though this Thanksgiving is not like any other, I find myself with many reasons to be grateful. At the top of the list is you, our customer! Thank you for all your support this year and all the years since we've opened our doors.

From our family to yours, may you have a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday!

Darin Campbell
President and CEO
Evergreen Bank Group

Tips for Making Your Healthy Salad More Exciting

How to turn your salad from a boring side dish into a delicious main course

Eating a salad is a great way to follow a healthy diet. But if you don't put much thought into your bowl as you're preparing it, that salad will end up being boring and possibly even unhealthy. To jazz up your greens, try some of these methods.

Start with the right greens

If your salads consist of primarily iceberg lettuce, you need a better foundation to your bowl. According to Oliva Tarantino of Eat This, Not That!, choosing the right lettuce for your meal is crucial — especially for salads. Based on a Centers for Disease Control report, she declares that spinach and leaf lettuce are two powerhouse health options. But the most nutritious green you can eat raw is watercress. "Gram for gram, this mild-tasting and flowery-looking green contains four times more beta carotene than an apple and a whopping 238 percent of your daily recommended dose of vitamin K per 100 grams," purports Tarantino. The best way to get a variety of nutrients in abundance is to blend a handful of different greens into the base of your salad. A good combination can include spinach, kale, watercress and arugula. These all have distinct flavors that blend well together.



Add something warm

A quick way to liven up a salad is to add something warm to it. The hot chicken strips are the best part of a grilled chicken salad, after all. Warm some leftover chicken or steak to beef up your salad. Heat apple or beet slices for a satisfying autumn taste. Sprinkle some freshly toasted almonds or pine nuts in for a crunchy topping. You can even warm up the dressing before your drizzle it on the salad. Sheela Prakash of Kitchn recommends doing this because "it gently wilts some of the greens and makes your salad taste a whole lot more satisfying."

Use unique or contrasting flavors

For a salad to be exciting, it can't be all one note. It needs a variety of bold flavors that engage different taste buds and yields a cornucopia of flavors. For example, strawberry and feta is a popular salad topping combination because of the interplay between the sweet fruit and salty cheese. Katie Ayoub shares some salad ideas from restaurants she likes in her article for Get Flavor. For instance, toss hot chicken tenders with blue cheese crumbles, apples, and red onion with some warm bacon-mustard dressing and topping a bowl of spinach. Ayoub recommends taking inspiration from your favorite dishes other than salad and adapting them to a salad bowl. "Salads are a perfect platform for modern flavor systems, taking the quintessential elements and tossing them into something entirely new."

Make your own dressing

The dressing is where practically all salads go from nourishing to detrimental. Most salad dressings are filled with fats and sugars. While you could forgo the dressing if you have good toppings already, it's not very difficult to make your own dressing. There are plenty of recipes online you can try, like a basic vinaigrette dressing offered by Kate Taylor on her website Cookie + Kate. It uses a combination of olive oil, your vinegar of choice, Dijon mustard, honey, minced garlic cloves, sea salt and ground black pepper. It's easy to start with a basic mixture like this and adjust it to coincide with your other salad toppings.

The next time you buy ingredients from the grocery store to make a salad, go beyond the prepackaged lettuce and venture outside the produce aisle for inspiration. If you think outside the box, you'll probably want to eat salad for every meal!

How to Volunteer Virtually

Giving back from the comfort of your own home

For those who are willing and able to give back, volunteering for various good causes can be a rewarding and even life-changing experience. While the idea of volunteering conjures images of outdoor activities and large crowds, it's just as easy and effective to give back from the comfort of your own home. Virtual volunteering can be a great way to aid those in need while still maintaining necessary social distancing.

Make donations

Donating various things is an easy way to give back. Donations can take many forms, ranging from physical items and money to your personal time. With many families currently struggling to care for their children, donations of necessary amenities like diapers, tissues, clothing and face masks are always welcome. Old toys and books can also be mailed or dropped off and sent to those in need. You can also volunteer your time speaking on crisis hotlines and even teaching skills to eager learners.

Aid at-risk individuals

In times of crisis, providing aid to at-risk groups like children, the sick, the elderly and those with mental disabilities is more important than ever. While donating money to charities is an easy way to help, there are other significant ways that you can volunteer your time to help such individuals. As previously mentioned, crisis hotlines and online therapy groups are a great way to give your time to those who need someone to listen. Sending food to hospitals, homeless shelters and food pantries can also make a big difference.

Apply your skills

When looking for volunteer work, tapping into your own skill set can often lead to exciting opportunities. With so many people currently looking to occupy their time at home, passing on your skills via online teaching and conferencing platforms can be a great way to give back. If you have a specific skill or perform a specific job, you can share your know-how and spread your knowledge to those who are interested.

Be creative

Using your creative energies to give back is a great way to volunteer from home. In addition to teaching your creative skills to others virtually, you can create signs, sew blankets and scarves for the homeless, write newsletters and blogs, translate important information into other languages, cook or bake food for those in need and much, much more. Creativity inspires positivity, and positivity is an excellent thing to spread during hard times.

Perform simple acts of kindness

Beyond donations, skill sharing and creativity, simply doing something nice for someone else can make a world of difference. Leave a note for health workers and frontline heroes thanking them for their services, or send them gift cards or homemade gifts. Order takeout from a local restaurant and leave your delivery person a nice tip. Make sure you check up on the people in your life and ask them how they're doing. Whenever someone performs a service for you, tell them how much you appreciate them. Even a seemingly simple act of kindness can go a long way.

With these helpful tips at your disposal, you'll be well equipped to help those in need without ever having to leave your home.



The History of Kwanzaa

A seven-day celebration of powerful principles and beloved traditions

At the end of every year, families and communities around the world celebrate African-American and pan-African heritage during the seven days of Kwanzaa. Although this holiday is of relatively recent origin, it is rooted in values and traditions that span centuries and continue to hold deep meaning today.

What is Kwanzaa?

Taking place each year from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1, Kwanzaa incorporates principles, symbols and practices from cultures and harvest festivals across Africa. Feasting, music, dancing, gift giving, and other celebratory activities are a major part of the holiday, but it's also an opportunity for participants to reflect on important values and how they're incorporating those into their lives. Overall, the goal of Kwanzaa is to unite African-Americans and others of African descent around a sense of shared community, affirmation and purpose. According to Kwanzaa's creator, it's intended as a secular celebration that can be observed in conjunction with Christmas or any other seasonal religious holiday.



The origin of Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa celebrates African cultural traditions, but it did not originate in Africa. It was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor of Black studies at California State University. Karenga was active in the Black nationalist movement, which pushed for African-Americans to develop their own institutions and prioritize their own identities instead of integrating or assimilating with the dominant white culture.

In creating Kwanzaa, Karenga incorporated elements from a variety of traditional African harvest celebrations. The name itself comes from the Swahili phrase "matunda ya kwanza," which means "first fruits." Karenga derived many of Kwanzaa's other elements from Swahili as well. Chimbuko Tembo, who helps lead the African American Cultural Center in Los Angeles, tells USA Today that Karenga chose Swahili because it spans ethnicities and is the most-spoken African language.

After Karenga introduced Kwanzaa, it gradually caught on in the U.S. and around the world, with its popularity peaking in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, observance of Kwanzaa is in decline, but the holiday still lives on as a culturally significant time of year for millions of people.

The principles and symbols of Kwanzaa

One of the most important aspects of Kwanzaa is the seven principles. Participants are encouraged to reflect on and commit to unity (umoya), self-determination (kujuchagua), collective work and responsibility (ujima), cooperative economics (ujamaa), purpose (nia), creativity (kuumba) and faith (imani).

Seven symbols also play an important role in Kwanzaa. In many celebrations, the Mkeka (a mat) is placed in a central area to hold six other symbols: Mazao (crops), the Vibunzi (an ear of corn), Zawadi (gifts), a Kikombe Cha Umoja (a unity cup), the Kinara (a candleholder) and the Mishumaa Saba (seven candles).

In many Kwanzaa gatherings, a nightly ceremony centers on the Mishumaa Saba. The central candle is black, symbolizing unity. Three red candles symbolize struggle and three green candles symbolize hope for the future. Each evening, participants light a candle to highlight one of the holiday's seven principles, then discuss that principle and how it relates to their lives.

For more than 50 years, Kwanzaa has encouraged unity and promoted a deep sense of heritage. With its positive focus on solidarity and strong values, it remains a vital holiday in African-American communities and beyond.

Groundbreaking Fantasy and Sci-Fi Novels by Women

Consider adding some diversity to your bookshelf

One perk of social distancing is that it gives you a lot of time to read at home. When you're loading up on new titles from your local independent bookstore, consider choosing a fantasy or science fiction book written by a woman author.

"The Daevabad Trilogy" by S.A. Chakraborty

If you're all about magic and independent women taking charge, "The Daevabad Trilogy" by S.A. Chakraborty is a must-read collection. Comprised of "The City of Brass," "The Kingdom of Copper" and "The Empire of Gold," the completed series tells the tale of Nahri, an eighteenth-century orphan from Egypt, as she's swept into a world of Middle Eastern djinn and other fantastic creatures. Chakraborty is a history buff, so this world is filled with real-life foods and traditions.

"Kindred" by Octavia Butler

Octavia Butler's "Kindred" is the first published science fiction book written by a Black woman. Even though it was first released in 1979, it still calls readers to its pages. The story centers on Dana, a Black woman from 1976, when she falls back in time to Maryland before the Civil War. She continues being pulled forward and backward in time as the narrative goes on, and she has to learn how to deal with the horrors of the past.

"The Binti Series" by Nnedi Okorafor

If you're looking for quicker reads, consider "The Binti Series" by Nnedi Okorafor: "Binti," "Home" and "The Night Masquerade." These three titles are novellas, or short books, that follow Binti as she attends a top university in space before she returns to her home planet, solving conflicts and disasters along the way. The first book in the series, "Binti," took home the 2016 Hugo Award and 2016 Nebula Award for Best Novella.

"The Sixth World" Books by Rebecca Roanhorse

For a dose of speculative science fiction, consider picking up "Trail of Lightning" by Rebecca Roanhorse, the first book in "The Sixth World" series. In this fantasy of the future, global warming has raised sea levels and flooded Earth. The Navajo nation, now known as the Dinetah, thrive in the new world alongside the monsters and gods of their tradition. Roanhorse's main character, monster hunter Maggie Hoskie, is looking for a missing girl from the reservation. From there she learns more about her tribe and her world, and what she discovers launches the main action of the series.

"Gods of Jade and Shadow" by Silvia Moreno-Garcia

"Gods of Jade and Shadow" by Silvia Moreno-Garcia follows the story of Mexican resident Casiopea Tun as she discovers a Mayan death god in her family home in the 1930s. She then accompanies the god, Hun-Kame, over the country to find his lost body parts so he can become whole and challenge his usurping twin, Vucub-Kame. There is a sprinkling of romance in this book, and you learn about creatures from Mayan lore along the way. If you like this book, Moreno-Garcia has other fantasy titles like "Signal to Noise" and "Certain Dark Things" available now. Her latest book, "Mexican Gothic," falls in the dark fantasy genre and earned a spot on the prestigious New York Times Best Seller list.

This list barely scratches the surface of science fiction and fantasy books written by women. If you want more recommendations, ask your local librarian or bookseller.

