

mexicali corn-nut salad

We had so much fun transporting this fresh, layered salad with Southern Cali roots to the beautiful hills of the Berkshires. It incorporates fun & vibrant colors which stimulate the palate even before you take the first bite. Spicy corn is offset by the cool, crunchy butter lettuce, chilled beets & citrus zestiness in the dressing. A hearty nut-based meat-substitute rounds out this fabulously filling west-coast take on a traditional taco salad. Whether served in tall mason jars for easy mobility to a picnic, or in your bag for work—or arranged on a beautiful plate

Another beautifully fun attribute of this salad is that individual elements can be swapped as your own local, seasonal fruits and vegetables come into their prime. Beets could easily be replaced with fresh squash or zucchini, lettuces can be interchanged and even the blueberry balsamic dressing could be, instead, a smooth peach & cilantro vinaigrette for example. Quinoa could be substituted by any of the other fabulous ancient grains, too. In short, there are countless fun iterations of this four-seasons-long salad you can play around with. Enjoy!

elements:

- *butter lettuce leaves
- *quinoa
- *roasted beets
- *nut meat
- *toasted corn
- *pepitas & fruit topping
- *dressing

serves 4-6 people

all ingredients:

approx. 12-18 large butter lettuce leaves	1 blood orange
1 cup un-cooked quinoa	1/4 cup balsamic vinaigrette
4-6 golden beets	1 cup walnuts or pecans
3 cups pre-cooked corn kernels	cilantro
olive oil	parsley
paprika	red onion
1 cumin	lime
turmeric	lemon
cayenne pepper	blackberries, goji berries, or other dark berry
salt & pepper	for garnish
honey or maple syrup (preferably locally-sourced)	*optional: avocado and sprigs of cilantro for garnish
fresh jalapeño	
pepitas	
1/2 pint of blueberries	

butter lettuce:

- prepare roughly 3 large leaves of butter lettuce per person
- rinse and pat dry

-put aside

quinoa:

**We used lovely organic quinoa grains from the local market, Guido's. If you're buying quinoa in bulk, we suggest mixing your own grains between white, black and red grains when available. Red and black grains will hold their shape better after cooking, and that will provide a better texture for your salad.*

- add 1 cup of quinoa to a medium saucepan
- add in approx. 2 Tb. of olive oil over medium heat
- gently stir the quinoa until lightly toasted, or until you can smell a nutty aroma
- turn off heat
- add 1 1/2-2 cups of water to pan and bring water to a boil
- immediately reduce heat to low and cover pot for 12-18 minutes, until grains have absorbed all the water and are tender (or use directions on your quinoa package)
- set aside if you're preparing your salad soon, or make a day in advance and refrigerate until needed, bringing it to room temp before serving.

golden beets:

**Golden beets are fantastic in salads, as they lend a bright, vibrant color that immediately stimulates the senses. They're oftentimes much milder and less-earthly than red beets, making them a great option for discerning palates. Golden beet, like most orange & yellow veggies, provide enormous amounts of vitamins and minerals! Because of this, we roast the beets with their skins on, so as to preserve as much of the beneficial qualities as possible.*

- pre-heat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit
- rinse 4 medium, or 6 small, beets vigorously, removing dirt and scrubbing into skin
- trim off any large roots or protrusions
- wrap beets in groups of 2 in aluminum foil, gathering the edges into "pockets", drizzling olive oil into the top before sealing
- bake for 45-60 minutes or until easily pierced with a fork
- when cooled, remove skin and chop into 1 inch pieces
- set aside if you're assembling the salad soon, or refrigerate a day in advance, bringing them back to room temp (or just slightly chilled) prior to serving.

toasted corn:

**Thanks to the lovely farmers at Taft Farms, just down the road, we access to flash-frozen fresh corn from last summer's harvest. Whenever possible, this salad is best made with in-season corn. When not available, of course, frozen organic corn kernels (prepared using the directions on the package, will work just fine! Additionally, this recipe (and others) call for honey. Local honey is always your best option, decreasing risk of allergen affects—for our visit to the Berkshires, we used Rulison Honey made in Amsterdam, New York.*

- place 3 cups of pre-cooked corn kernels into a large skillet with olive oil, gently stir over medium heat until all kernels are covered.
- add in 1-2 minced garlic cloves
- in a separate, small bowl, combine 1 Tsp of paprika, cumin, cayenne pepper & turmeric (each), then sprinkle over the corn
- generously season with salt and pepper
- over medium-high heat, stir the kernels constantly until they begin to lightly sear. Be cautious as some kernels will actually 'pop' out of the pan, so be careful!

- once you have a nice color, remove the pan from heat and immediately add in 1 Tablespoon of honey (preferably locally-sourced). Pour kernels into mixing bowl.
- add in 1/2 tsp of minced jalapeño. If you like a nice kick in your cuisine, feel free to add more—leaving the seeds in for even more spice!
- add in 3 Tbsp. of finely chopped cilantro, and stir completely
- season with additional salt & pepper if needed (keeping in mind there will be a dressing over top anyhow)
- this, too can be made in advance and served within the salad at room temp, or slightly warmed.

spiced pepitas:

- pre-heat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit
- place approx. half cup of pepitas (pumpkin seeds) on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper
- drizzle olive oil over top and gently toss
- sprinkle approx. 1 tsp of salt, 1/2 tsp black pepper, 1/4 tsp paprika, 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper over top.
- bake in oven for 5-7 minutes or until seeds become lightly browned at the edges
- remove from tray immediately and let cool in a separate bowl

'neat nut meat':

- pulse 1 cup walnuts or pecans in food processor till thoroughly chopped but NOT finely ground, remove and place in separate bowl
- pulse 1 package of baby bella mushrooms in the same manner, remove and add to bowl of nuts
- mince 1 small red onion, 1/2 of a jalapeño, 2 cloves of garlic and add to bowl (or, easier, add to food processor with one of the previous ingredients)
- stir in the juice of 1 lime and 1 lemon, 1 Tbsp local maple syrup, a dash of salt & pepper, 1/2 tsp paprika, 1/4 tsp cumin, 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper—combine until well-seasoned.
- lastly, stir in 1 Tbsp of olive oil with 1/8 cup finely chopped parsley leaves, and 1/8 cup finely chopped cilantro leaves.
- let this mixture marinate for at least an hour, or overnight in the fridge

blueberry, blood orange & balsamic vinaigrette:

- place 1 small container (1/2 pint) of washed blueberries in a saucepan with 1/4 cup of balsamic vinegar and a dash of water, bring to a simmer until berries become soft and mash-able. remove from heat.
- stir in the juice and pulp of 1 blood orange (optional, add some of the orange zest, too)
- combine contents of saucepan with 1/4 cup olive oil, salt, pepper and 2 Tbsp. local honey or maple syrup into blender and combine till completely emulsified
- taste and adjust for sweetness or saltiness

to serve:

- tear washed butter lettuce leaves into the bottom of a wide-mouthed quart mason jar, or arrange generously on the bottom of a large plate.
- arrange 1/4-1/2 cup of cooked quinoa on top of that (depending of if you're serving 4 or 6)

- next, add your roasted beets
- then, add 1/4-1/2 cup of corn on top
- top with same amount of 'neat nut meat'
- garnish generously with toasted pepitas, fresh blackberries, blueberries and/or dried goji berries.
- sparingly drizzle with chilled berry balsamic vinaigrette
- *optional, add 2-3 slices of fresh avocado (when in season) on top with fresh sprigs of cilantro.

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