

STIR IT UP! by Marialisa Calta

PUT YOUR FRUIT IN PARTY CLOTHES

Fruit salad. It sounds so great -- fresh and sweet and tasty. And anyone can chop up a mess of fruit and dump it in a bowl. But if you are looking for a party-worthy fruit salad, you may need some help.

First, think fresh. You can make a fruit compote from canned or frozen fruits, but for a seasonal delicacy, use fresh.

Second, think seasonal. Seasonal fruits, locally grown when possible, will be the tastiest for your salad. Some may even have ripened on the vine, not in the truck! Check farmers markets and farm stands in your area. Supermarkets these days also feature local produce.

Third, think texture. You want a combination of something crisp (watermelon, pineapple) and softer fruits like berries.

Fourth, think flavor. Plain fruit, unadorned, is a treat. But if you want to fancy it up, here are some ideas for flavor accents:

-- Toasted nuts. Most nuts toast in 5 to 8 minutes in an oven set at 350 degrees. Almonds, pecans, hazelnuts and walnuts are good choices. If you are a billionaire, try pine nuts. Add nuts just before serving so they don't get soggy.

-- Liqueurs. Try fruit or nut-flavored liqueurs such as Grand Marnier and Triple Sec (orange), framboise or Chambord (raspberry), Frangelico (hazelnut) and amaretto (almond). In the winter, an eau de vie like Poire William (pear), a brandy like Calvados (apple) or a drizzle of rum can really jazz up a fruit salad. If you don't want to use alcohol, try fruit juices: Orange and cranberry are good bets.

-- Candied ginger and dried, chopped fruits.

-- Herbs and spices. Fresh mint leaves, lavender, a grinding of cinnamon or cardamom ... experiment! How about a few sprigs of fresh basil or lemon grass?

-- Citrus zest.

-- Fancy sugars or honey. Sprinkle the fruit with turbinado, muscovado or demerara brown sugars, or with apple blossom, chestnut or lavender honey.

The recipes here come from books old and new. "The Back in the Swing Cookbook" by Barbara C. Unell and Judith Fertig (Andrews McMeel, 2012) is written for survivors of breast cancer, with recipes that are healthy and delicious. The authors describe the concoction here as "fruit in party clothes." "The Fearington House Cookbook" by Jenny Fitch (Ventana Press, 1988)



Honey and citrus juices turn plain fruit into party fare. Credit: Photo by Sara Remington for "The Back in the Swing Cookbook" by Barbara C. Unell and Judith Fertig, Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2012.

is an oldie but goodie, and it is an indispensable volume if you like to entertain without doing yourself in. The Grand Marnier sauce also goes exceptionally well with poundcake.

MEXICAN FRUIT SALAD WITH HONEY-LIME DRESSING

Yield: 4 servings

1 cup chopped fresh mango, papaya or cantaloupe
1 cup fresh blueberries
1 cup chopped fresh honeydew melon or kiwi
1 cup fresh pineapple chunks
1 cup seedless red or green grapes
1 tablespoon fresh orange zest
1/2 cup fresh orange juice
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1/3 cup honey
1/4 cup fresh lime juice

Combine mango, blueberries, honeydew, pineapple and grapes in a large bowl. Stir together the orange zest, orange juice and lemon juice in a small bowl, then pour over the fruit. Toss gently to blend. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Immediately before serving, whisk together honey and lime juice in a small bowl. Pour over the salad and toss to blend. Serve salad in glass dishes.

Recipe from "The Back in the Swing Cookbook" by Barbara C. Unell and Judith Fertig (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2012).

FRUIT SALAD WITH GRAND MARNIER SAUCE

Yield: 8 servings

For the sauce:
4 or 5 egg yolks
1/3 cup sugar
1 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons Grand Marnier
For the salad:

1/2 cup sugar
1 1/2 cups water
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 tablespoons Grand Marnier
2 to 3 oranges
3 to 4 kiwis
1 cantaloupe
1/2 honeydew melon
1 pineapple
4 ounces green or red grapes
1 star fruit (optional)

Make the sauce: Place egg yolks and sugar in the top of a double boiler set over simmering water, or place them in a small saucepan over very low heat. Cook slowly, stirring constantly, about 10 minutes, or until sugar has dissolved and the mixture has thickened. Set aside to cool. Whip cream until soft peaks form. Combine cream with yolk mixture and Grand Marnier. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use, up to 1 week.

Make the salad: In a small pot over medium-low heat, dissolve sugar in water, stirring until sugar is dissolved, about 3 minutes. Set aside to cool. Add lemon juice and Grand Marnier.

Peel oranges and kiwis and slice into bite-size pieces. Remove rinds from the melons and pineapple and cut fruit into bite-size pieces. Cut grapes in half and remove seeds, if desired. Thinly slice star fruit, if using. Add all the fruit to the syrup, toss, cover and chill thoroughly. Serve with Grand Marnier sauce on the side.

Recipe from "The Fearington House Cookbook" by Jenny Fitch (Ventana Press, 1988).