

BY ALISON GWINN  PHOTOGRAPHY BY RACHEL ADAMS  STYLING BY BRITTINI BELL WARSHAW

SALAD DAYS

In the spring, our thoughts turn to baseball, open-toed shoes, Frisbee in the park and salads. Ah, yes, salads. It's officially time to put away your slow cookers and pull out your cutting boards. To get you inspired, we asked three top Denver restaurants to whip up their favorite spring greens.

Ready, set, start chopping



ROASTED PEAR *with BURRATA SALAD* p. 72



Olive & Finch

“This is my take on a classic Caprese salad, with touches of spring, like the peppery watercress. **The roasted pears and pomegranate are great transitional-season flavors, and nothing says warm weather to me like watercress and heirloom tomatoes.**”

—Mary Nguyen, chef-owner, Olive & Finch
oliveandfincheatery.com



DRESSED to the NINES

“My No. 1 thing for making a good salad is the dressing,” says Lee Goodfriend, owner of Racines. “If you make it from scratch, it’s everything.”

EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

CITRUS CHAMPAGNE

BALSAMIC

APPLE CIDER

RED WINE

TARRAGON

For basic dressings, start with a high-quality **olive oil**, says Thomas Wright, executive chef at Racines. (The bottle of extra virgin above left is from California Olive Ranch.) Look for oil sold in a tinted bottle or a tin (to protect the oil from light); the words “extra virgin,” which indicate the purest and least processed oil; a USDA organic seal; and a “best by” date (you want your olive oil to be fresh, not aged). To keep your oil at its tastiest, seal it tight and store it away from heat; if you don’t think you’ll use it up quickly, buy smaller bottles.

Next step: vinegar. But what kind? The variety of vinegars on fine-grocery shelves today is staggering. Above, left to right, are a

few favorites: **red wine vinegar** (bold and richly flavored; the best of these will name the grape on their labels); **citrus champagne vinegar** (like its name, this one is sparkling, fresh and crisp); **balsamic vinegar** (sweet to the point of decadence, the traditional versions are made in Italy from cooked trebbiano grapes, then aged in wooden barrels); **tarragon vinegar** (flavored vinegars, infused with everything from herbs such as tarragon and thyme to fruits and peppers, are increasingly the rage); and **apple cider vinegar** (currently a favorite of keto-diet folks, who say it aids weight loss, this one is bright, refreshing and balanced).

ST. PAUL SALAD
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Olive & Finch

"I love this salad for spring because it's such a great transition. **Springtime feasts call for hearty meat and potatoes with some seasonal brightness**, and I like this salad version because it's a little lighter but still hearty, all in one flavorful, satiating and beautiful bowlful."

—Mary Nguyen, chef-owner, Olive & Finch
oliveandfincheatery.com





FIVE RULES FOR A GREAT SALAD

1. MAKE YOUR OWN DRESSING.

It's way easier than you might imagine. Just remember the standard vinaigrette formula (three parts oil to one part vinegar) and adjust to suit your tastebuds. Add favorite flavors (herbs, shallots, chili flakes, garlic, etc.) and—voilà!—you are a star.

2. TREAT YOUR GREENS WITH CARE.

Wash them as soon as you buy them, and then dry them thoroughly in a salad spinner. If you don't have a spinner, you can wrap the wet greens in a paper towel, holding the ends, and then take them outside to fling off the extra moisture. For most herbs, snip off the stems and keep in a jar of fresh water in the door of the fridge; for basil, keep the leaves on the plant and set on your counter.

3. BALANCE FLAVORS.

You want to be able to taste everything in your salad, from the citrus of lemon juice to the bitterness of arugula to the sweet nuttiness of a handful of pecans. Taste as you go, and don't forget to add a touch of salt and pepper—or herbs such as cilantro or mint—to add some zing.

4. CHOP WITH CARE.

One way to add beauty to your salad is to cut the extra veggies in various shapes. A good, sharp knife can do wonders, of course, but you can also use a potato peeler to create pretty shavings (of, say, carrots and cucumbers) and a grater to create julienned peppers, green onions and the like. As for most forms of lettuce, it's best to tear the leaves; they will brown less quickly if you do.

5. DON'T OVERDRESS.

Wait until the last minute to start adding dressing so the greens don't turn soggy, and add a little dressing at a time—too little is better than too much. Toss with your hands.

ADDING COLOR *and* TEXTURE

Once you choose your greens, the foundation of a salad, it's time to add some fun: crunchy nuts and seeds, chewy dried fruit, piquant cheeses. Get inspired with this page of ideas.



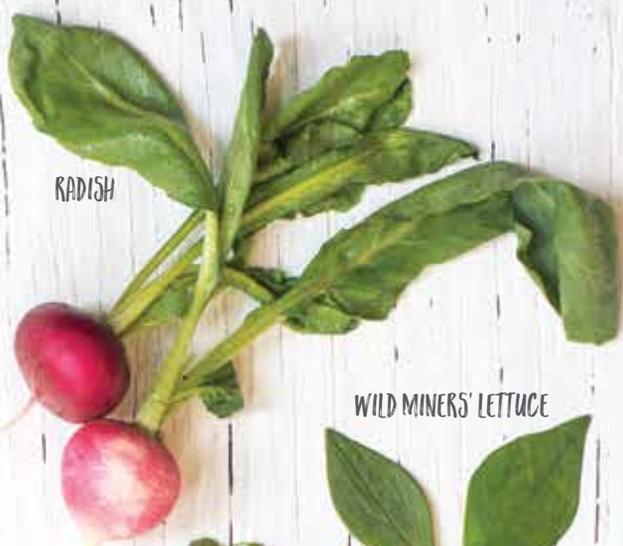
TOP ROW: Fennel seeds, chia seeds, crushed red peppers, black and white sesame seeds, coarse sea salt, Szechuan peppercorns, white peppercorns, morel mushrooms, lobster mushrooms, poppy seeds **SECOND ROW:** Radish slices, shredded beets, corn kernels, sliced cucumbers, pickled red onions, carrot slices, sliced scallions **THIRD ROW:** Cilantro, dill, Italian parsley, edible flowers, chives, marinated olives **FOURTH ROW:** Pecans, croutons, raw sunflower seeds, spicy mix, walnuts, pepitas, spiced and roasted chickpeas **FIFTH ROW:** Raisins, blueberries, orange and grapefruit slices, pomegranate seeds, apple slices, currants, strawberries, star fruit, dried cherries and dried papaya **SIXTH ROW:** Edam chunks, feta, sliced asiago, crumbled eggs, blue cheese, goat cheese

A bunch of dark purple, deeply lobed leaves on a stem.

SCARLET FRILL

A bunch of small, round, light green leaves on thin stems.

MICRO ARUGULA

A bunch of bright red, round radishes with green leafy tops.

RADISH

A bunch of small, oval-shaped green leaves on thin stems.

WILD MINERS' LETTUCE

GLOSSARY of GREENS

ADDITIONS THAT WILL MAKE YOUR SALAD POP

SCARLET FRILL A purple-red mustard green from Japan with deeply cut leaves and a mildly spicy or mustardy flavor. **MICRO ARUGULA** Tiny but tasty, this green is high in phytochemicals, antioxidants and B vitamins, especially folate. **RADISH** These crunchy little orbs look like jewels in a salad, add a sweet, juicy, slightly biting flavor and come in a variety of hues, from deep red to white. **WILD MINERS' LETTUCE** Petite and delicate, it has thin, crunchy lemon-lime stems with tender, sweet leaves. Native to much of the West, it sprouts in the spring and was often eaten by California Gold Rush miners. **WOOD SORREL** This green, which looks like a three-leaf clover and grows wild all over the West, has a distinctively lemony, tangy flavor. (The genus name is oxalis, which comes from the Greek word for "sour.") **BABY KALE** As nutritious as mature kale, it's tender enough to be used in salads, adding a sweet, nutty flavor. **PEA GREENS** Also called pea tendrils or pea shoots, these vines with fresh, vibrant leaves have a delicate crunch and a sweet flavor; they are versatile enough to go with almost anything. **MICRO KALE** With their mild, sweet flavor and bright hues, they make great salad garnishes, and studies have found that microgreens are packed with more nutrients than mature leaves. **GREEN ROMAINE** Grown in small heads, fresh romaine lettuce has a sweet, mild flavor and a soft, tender texture, making it a great foundational salad ingredient. **RED-VEINED SORREL** With its bright-green leaves and dark maroon veins, sorrel adds beautiful pops of color and a sharp, tart flavor to salads. **ARUGULA** This peppery green has hints of mustard and nuts (the pungent flavor is due to its high sulfur content).

A bunch of green, arrow-shaped leaves on a stem.

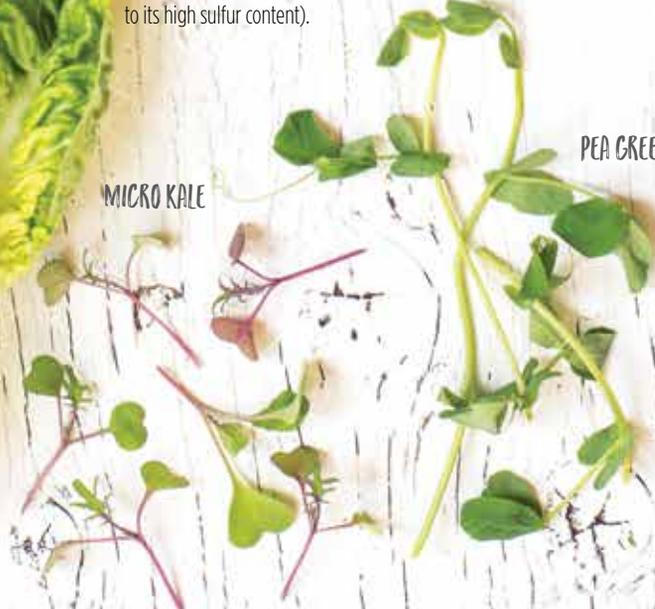
ARUGULA

A bunch of small, three-lobed green leaves on a stem.

WOOD SORREL

A bunch of small, oval-shaped green leaves with prominent dark red veins.

RED-VEINED SORREL

A bunch of small, round, light green leaves on thin stems.

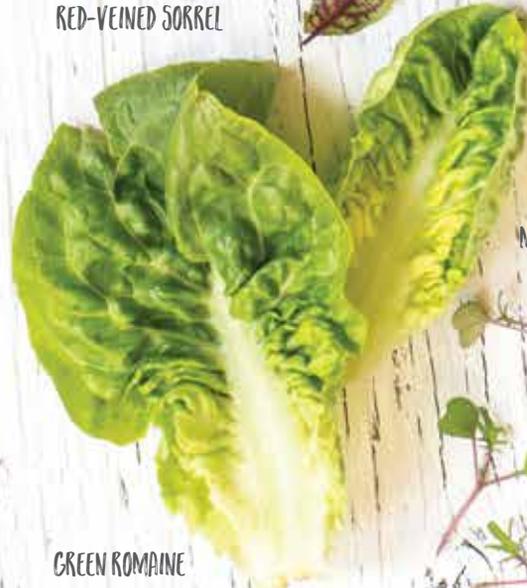
MICRO KALE

A bunch of pea tendrils with small, round leaves and thin stems.

PEA GREENS

A bunch of small, curly green leaves on a stem.

BABY KALE

A bunch of large, green, crinkled leaves.

GREEN ROMAINE



Racines

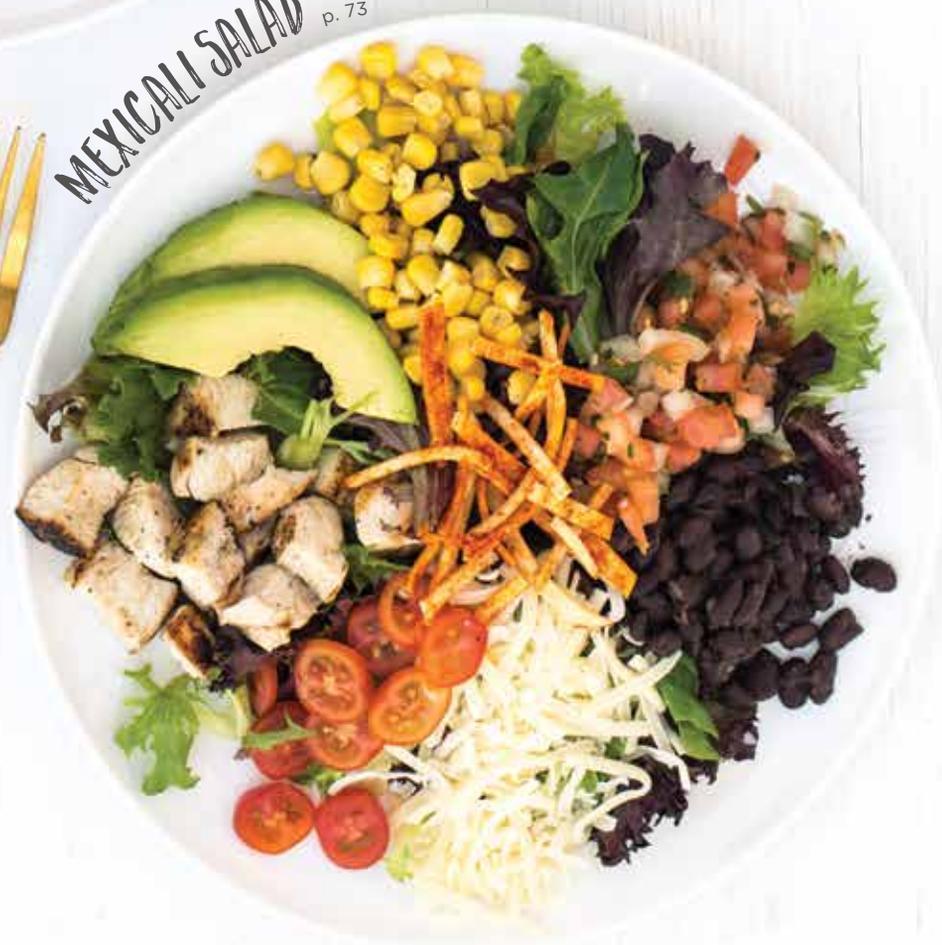
"This salad has all of my favorite ingredients: shrimp, avocado, artichoke hearts and hearts of palm." —Lee Goodfriend, owner, Racines **"Plus, it's really colorful, and you can serve it with the shrimp either warm or cold."** —Thomas Wright, executive chef, Racines

"The Mexicali is one of our staples. **It tastes great. It's got organic, fresh romaine, frisée and radicchio.** We always try to get the best product, preferably grown outdoors."

—Goodfriend
racinesrestaurant.com



MEXICALI SALAD p. 73





GREAT PICK ME-UPS

GRAB A PAIR OF THESE PRETTY SERVERS TO ELEVATE YOUR SALAD EVEN FURTHER

1. **West Elm spiral salad servers**, \$29 for set, westelm.com; 2. **Crate & Barrel "Sheesham" salad hands**, \$20 for set, crateandbarrel.com; 3. **West Elm gold salad servers**, \$39 for set, westelm.com; 4. **"Antuco" salad servers**, \$35 for set, crateandbarrel.com; and 5. **Be Home teak servers**, \$40 for set, surlatable.com



ALASKAN KING CRAB SALAD

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Mercantile DINING & PROVISION

“This salad showcases Alaskan king crab and sheepskyr from the farm. We added an element of health with coconut, chia, passion fruit and pineapple. **This plate is meant to be beautiful to the eye but also playful in textures and flavors.** The brightness of the passion fruit, coupled with the richness of the crab, the acidity of the skyr and the texture of the chia seeds, makes for a good combination.”

—Alex Seidel, chef-owner, Mercantile
mercantiledenver.com





RECIPES

Roasted Pear with Burrata Salad

Courtesy Olive and Finch; serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Roasted Pear (see recipe)**
- 2-3 cups heirloom tomatoes, halved (small) or wedged (large)**
- 4, 8- to 10-ounce balls fresh burrata cheese**
- 1 tablespoon balsamic reduction**
- Extra-virgin olive oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- 3 cups watercress, thin stems and leaves only**
- ¼ cup pomegranate seeds**
- 1 tablespoon Basil Oil (see recipe)**
- Fleur de sel**

ROASTED PEAR

- 1½ tablespoons white balsamic vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 large firm, ripe Anjou pear, peeled, cored and cut into 4 wedges**

BASIL OIL

- 1½ cups fresh basil leaves, packed**
- ¾ cup olive oil**
- Salt and pepper to taste**

DIRECTIONS

TO MAKE THE ROASTED PEAR: Adjust oven rack to center position and preheat to 425 F. In a small bowl, mix vinegar, oil, salt and pepper. Gently toss pear wedges with vinegar mixture and spread them out in a shallow roasting pan. Roast, uncovered, 25 to 30 minutes or until pear is tender and beginning to brown, turning twice. Remove pan from oven, set on a wire rack and let wedges cool in pan. When cool, lift out, discarding any liquid. Thinly slice pear wedges.

TO MAKE THE BASIL OIL: Blanch basil in medium saucepan of boiling water 10 seconds. Drain. Rinse under cold water. Pat dry with paper towels and transfer to blender. Add oil; purée until smooth. Transfer to a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper. (Can be made three days ahead. Cover and chill. Let stand at room temperature 30 minutes before using.)

TO ASSEMBLE SALAD: Fan sliced pears on 4 plates. Place cut tomatoes and burrata in a medium bowl, drizzle generously with olive oil and sprinkle with kosher salt and pepper. Mix well and place tomatoes on the plate opposite the pears, leaving a space for the burrata. Reserve the tomato juices in the bowl. Place burrata in the center of the plates. Add watercress to the bowl, drizzle with additional olive oil and sprinkle

with kosher salt and pepper. Divide dressed watercress among the 4 plates. Sprinkle with pomegranate seeds and drizzle with basil oil and balsamic reduction. Sprinkle fleur de sel on the plate.

St. Paul Salad

Courtesy Olive & Finch; serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup Fig Balsamic Vinaigrette (see recipe)**
- 1 cup small heirloom tomatoes, halved**
- 1 pound Heirloom Roasted Potatoes (see recipe)**
- 1 cup Roasted Mushrooms (see recipe)**
- 3 cups baby spinach**
- 3 cups arugula**
- ½ cup blue cheese crumbles**
- ¼ cup red onion, thinly sliced and rinsed**
- 4, 5- to 6-ounce filet mignon steaks, roughly 2 to 3 inches thick (see recipe)**
- 1 tablespoon Italian parsley, leaves only, fine chopped**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

FIG BALSAMIC VINAIGRETTE

- 2 tablespoons fig purée**
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar**
- 1 cup balsamic vinegar**
- 1 teaspoon thyme, finely minced**
- 1 large clove garlic, peeled, finely minced**
- 2 ½ cups olive oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

HEIRLOOM ROAST POTATOES

- 1 pound rainbow fingerling potatoes, halved (small) or wedged (large)**
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil**
- 1 garlic clove, crushed**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

ROASTED MUSHROOMS

- ½ pound cremini mushrooms, trimmed and quartered**
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- 2-3 sprigs thyme or rosemary**
- ½ tablespoon parsley, chopped**

DIRECTIONS

TO MAKE THE FIG BALSAMIC VINAIGRETTE: Combine all ingredients except oil in a food processor. Turn to low and slowly add oil to emulsify. Salt and pepper to taste.

TO MAKE THE HEIRLOOM ROASTED POTATOES: Adjust oven rack to center position and preheat oven to 425 F. Line baking sheet with

aluminum foil. Place clean and cut potatoes in a bowl. Drizzle olive oil, crushed garlic cloves, salt and pepper over potatoes. Toss well. Place potatoes on lined baking sheet and bake 15 minutes; remove from oven, turn over and bake 10 more minutes. Remove from oven and cool until ready to serve.

TO MAKE THE ROASTED MUSHROOMS:

Adjust oven rack to center position and preheat to 375 F. Toss mushrooms with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a foil-lined, rimmed baking sheet; spread into an even layer. Top mushrooms with thyme or rosemary sprigs. Transfer to oven and roast until mushrooms release liquid, about 15 minutes. Continue roasting until browned but still tender, about 30 minutes longer. Discard thyme or rosemary. Transfer to a bowl, toss with parsley and cool until ready to serve.

TO MAKE THE FILET MIGNON:

Generously season filets with kosher salt and pepper. Adjust oven rack to center position and preheat to 425 F. Heat a cast-iron skillet on stovetop until smoking hot. Sear steaks on all four sides. Transfer skillet directly to oven and cook 4-5 minutes (medium rare) or until the internal temperature is to your liking. Remove filets from skillet, set on a plate, lightly cover with aluminum foil and allow to rest 5 minutes before cutting.

TO ASSEMBLE THE SALAD: Add half of Fig Balsamic Vinaigrette to a medium bowl. Add tomatoes, potatoes and mushrooms and mix well. In another bowl, add remaining vinaigrette, spinach, arugula, half of the blue cheese and onions; lightly toss. Season with salt and pepper. Once steaks have rested, slice thinly, then fan slices on a plate. Sprinkle with chopped parsley, salt and pepper. Layer vegetables and greens on top. Sprinkle with remaining blue cheese and parsley.

Lee's Shrimp Salad

Courtesy Racines; serves 1

INGREDIENTS

- 6 ounces mixed field greens**
- 3 ounces artichoke hearts, quartered**
- 3 ounces hearts of palm, sliced**
- 3 ounces carrots, sliced thin**
- 6, 16/20 count Argentine red shrimp, grilled or sautéed**
- ½ avocado, sliced thin**
- 6 grape tomatoes, halved or quartered**
- 1 green onion, sliced thin**
- 2 ounces cucumber, sliced**
- 5 thin slices watermelon radish**
- ½ ounce shredded Parmesan cheese**
- Racines Red Wine Vinaigrette (see recipe)**



RECIPES

RACINES RED WINE VINAIGRETTE

Makes 2 cups

- ½ **tablespoon ground black pepper**
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt**
- ½ **tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- ½ **ounce crushed fresh garlic**
- 1 cup red wine vinegar**
- ¾ **cups olive oil**

DIRECTIONS

TO MAKE THE RED WINE VINAIGRETTE: In a blender, combine all ingredients except olive oil and pulse to combine. On medium speed, add olive oil in a steady stream to combine. Dressing will separate after sitting; shake to reincorporate.

TO ASSEMBLE THE SALAD: Place field greens in the center of a large bowl or plate, layering vertically. Place toppings on and around field greens. Finish by placing shrimp in a circle around field greens; add avocado slices to top, sprinkle cheese evenly over entire salad and garnish with watermelon radish spirals around base. Dress with red wine vinaigrette.

Racines Mexicali Salad

Courtesy Racines; serves 1

INGREDIENTS

- ½ **cup corn oil**
- 1 yellow corn tortilla, cut into ½-inch strips**
- 8 ounces mixed field greens**
- 6 ounces chicken breast (grilled or baked, diced into ½-inch cubes)**
- 4 tablespoons corn, fresh or frozen**
- 4 tablespoons black beans**
- 4 tablespoons pico de gallo**
- ½ **avocado, sliced thin**
- 4 grape tomatoes, halved**
- 4 tablespoons white cheddar cheese, shredded**
- Salsa Ranch Dressing (see recipe)**

SALSA RANCH DRESSING

Makes 4 ounces

INGREDIENTS

- 2 ounces your favorite ranch dressing**
- 2 ounces your favorite salsa**

DIRECTIONS

TO MAKE THE SALSA RANCH DRESSING: Combine ranch dressing and salsa, place in nonreactive container and refrigerate until ready to use. May be done 1 day early.

TO MAKE THE SALAD: In a small sauté pan, heat corn oil to 325 F; fry tortilla strips until golden and crisp. Remove from oil and place on paper towels to cool. Place field greens mix in the center of a large bowl or plate. Decorate by placing toppings in vertical strips from the top of the salad to

the bottom. Place tortilla strips vertically in the center of the salad. Top with Salsa Ranch Dressing.

Alaskan King Crab Salad

Courtesy Mercantile Dining & Provision; serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- 3 radishes, thinly sliced on a mandolin**
- 1 ounce mixed petit mustard greens**
- 5 ounces Alaskan king crab, cleaned and sliced**
- ½ **cup pineapple, small dice**
- ½ **cup puffed grains (amaranth, buckwheat, quinoa)**
- Chia Seed Pudding (see recipe)**
- Passion Fruit Curd (see recipe)**
- Vinaigrette (see recipe)**

CHIA SEED PUDDING

- 1 cup coconut milk**
- ¼ **cup honey**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- ¼ **cup chia seeds**
- ½ **cup sheepskyr**

PASSION FRUIT CURD

- 1 sheet gelatin, gold grade**
- 1 ½ **large eggs**
- 1 egg yolk**
- 4 ounces sugar**
- ½ **cup passion fruit purée**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 3 ounces unsalted butter, room temperature**

VINAIGRETTE

- 1 shallot, minced**
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice**
- Micro zest of 1 lemon**
- 3 tablespoons olive oil**
- Salt to taste**
- White pepper to taste**

DIRECTIONS

TO MAKE THE CHIA SEED PUDDING: Combine all ingredients except the chia seeds and sheepskyr in a blender; blend on high speed 30 seconds, until incorporated. Transfer to a mixing bowl. Whisk in chia seeds. Fold in sheepskyr. Place in refrigerator at least 4 hours, or overnight. Stir occasionally to keep pockets of chia seeds from forming.

TO MAKE THE PASSION FRUIT CURD: Bloom gelatin in ice water. Over a double boiler, heat all ingredients except butter and gelatin, whisking constantly as you bring up to 180 F. Remove from heat and whisk in bloomed gelatin and butter, until fully incorporated. Strain through a fine mesh strainer.

Cool completely in refrigerator. Once cool, transfer to a squeeze bottle or a pastry bag. Reserve.

TO MAKE THE VINAIGRETTE: Place shallot, lemon juice and lemon zest in a mixing bowl. Whisk in olive oil and season with salt and white pepper. Reserve.

TO MAKE THE SALAD: Combine sliced radish and mustard greens in a mixing bowl. Gently dress with reserved vinaigrette and season lightly with salt. To plate, spoon a small amount of reserved chia pudding on four plates. Using the spoon, gently spread to make a thin layer in the shape of a circle. Place crab on top of the chia pudding, then layer with equal amounts of the radish and greens mix.

Using a squeeze bottle or pastry bag, pipe the passion fruit into small dots around and on top of the salad. Finish the salad with pineapple and the puffed grains.

Spring Legume Salad

Courtesy Mercantile Dining & Provision; serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- 8 stalks rapini or broccoli rabe, blanched and shocked**
- 28 haricots verts, grilled and cooled**
- 20 sugar snap peas, blanched and shocked**
- 2 cups fava beans, blanched and shocked**
- 2 cups pea greens**
- Salt and white pepper to taste**
- 1 cup Fruition Farms Sheep's Milk Feta, crumbled**
- Beluga Lentil Vinaigrette (see recipe)**

VINAIGRETTE

- 1 shallot, minced**
- 2 tablespoons Meyer lemon juice**
- 2 tablespoons champagne vinegar**
- Zest of 2 Meyer lemons**
- ¼ **cup grapeseed oil**
- Salt to taste**
- White pepper to taste**
- ½ **cup black lentils, cooked and cooled**
- 2 teaspoons parsley, minced**

DIRECTIONS

TO MAKE THE BELUGA LENTIL VINAIGRETTE: In a mixing bowl, combine shallot, lemon juice, vinegar and lemon zest. Whisk in oil and season with salt and white pepper. Fold in cooked lentils and parsley. Reserve.

TO MAKE THE SALAD: Combine rapini, haricots verts, snap peas, fava beans and pea greens in a mixing bowl. Season with salt and white pepper, then dress with some of reserved vinaigrette. Plate salad on four individual plates. Finish dish with crumbled feta and spoonful of vinaigrette.