


Summertime and the Livin' Is Easy

OR, IT SHOULD BE. We have a short season... like right now... to take any opportunity to spend a few hours outdoors. The fruit trees are lush and laden with the promise of what's to come. The shade trees beckon, providing dappled light and glorious shadows as the afternoon wanes.

Seating can be anything from a blanket to a lawn chair, table, or swaying hammock. The outdoor air not only clears the cobwebs of winter, it opens the tastebuds for the fresh, crisp vegetables and fruits we crave all winter.

So. The food. Fare is fair. A group of friends getting together shouldn't cause anxiety for anyone. The division of labor pretty much holds sway: "You bring the sandwiches. I'll bring the dessert." Anything along those lines shouldn't meet any resistance. Neither should this: "I'll bring some beer and a few bottles of chilled rosé."

Now. The food. Of course, anything hand-held works. A sandwich, pickle spear, potato chips, squares of cheese or a hard-boiled egg. But so do salads, if they're not dripping with dressing or have ingredients that wilt in the sun. Carrots, radishes, celery. Put them out and watch people who never gravitate to salad come back for more. 

Celery Salad with Dates and Almonds



INGREDIENTS:

8 celery stalks, leaves separated, sliced on steep angle ¼ inch thick
4 Medjool dates, pitted and roughly chopped
½ cup roughly chopped toasted almonds
3 T. lemon juice
¼ t. dried chili flakes
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 ounces Parmigiano, shaved into shards
Finishing quality olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place the celery in a bowl of ice water for 20 minutes. Drain and pat dry and place in bowl. Add the celery leaves, dates, almonds, lemon juice and chili flakes. Toss together. Season generously with salt and pepper. Toss with olive oil and taste. Adjust seasonings. Serve with shards of Parmesan on top. Serves 4.



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Carrot Salad with Salted Nuts and Raisins



INGREDIENTS:

1 lb. carrots, shredded or cut into matchsticks
1 tablespoon lime or orange zest
1 small clove garlic, finely minced
1/3 cup raisins
3 scallions, thinly sliced
½ cup chopped cilantro leaves and tender stems (or substitute Italian parsley)
¼ cup olive oil
3 T. fresh lime juice or orange juice
2 t. honey
½ t. kosher salt
½ t. freshly ground peppercorns
½ t. ground turmeric
1 t. curry powder
¼ t. cayenne, or to taste
½ cup toasted cashews, slivered almonds, or salted peanuts

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place the carrots in a large bowl and toss with the zest, minced garlic, raisins, scallions, and cilantro or parsley.
2. In a small bowl whisk together the olive oil, lime or orange juice, honey, salt, pepper, turmeric, curry powder, and cayenne. Pour over carrots and toss to combine. Add the nuts and toss once again. Note: The carrot salad may be made 2-3 days in advance and kept covered and refrigerated. Serves 6.