

May 22, 2011

Ingredients for Grilled Pineapple Salsa

½ fresh pineapple, peeled, cored and cut into rings

1 red onion, thickly sliced

Olive oil for drizzling

1 jalapeño chili

½ avocado, peeled and diced

1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh mint

Juice of 1 lime

Kosher salt, to taste

Ingredients for Black Bean Salad

For the vinaigrette:

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 Tbs. fresh lime juice

2 Tbs. red wine vinegar

1 Tbs. cumin powder

1 Tbs. chili powder

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. freshly ground pepper

Hot-pepper sauce, to taste

Olive oil for grilling

2 small yellow onions, quartered

2 yellow bell peppers, quartered and seeded

2 red bell peppers, quartered and seeded

2 Anaheim chilies, halved and seeded

2 jalapeño chilies, halved and seeded

2 cans (each 15 oz.) black beans, drained and rinsed

1 bunch fresh cilantro, leaves only, chopped

1 red onion, diced

Whenever guests gather for a grilled meal, their appetites are heightened the moment they catch their first whiff of smoke rising from the fire. The best way to appease their hunger while you finish cooking the main course is to offer up some tasty grilled starters to launch the feast. When you're planning the menu, keep in mind mood, color, flavor and texture, and try to strike a balance among these elements. Pair elegant appetizers with upscale main dishes or choose finger food to begin a backyard barbecue. Cooking starters and sides on the grill will keep the kitchen cool on warm summer evenings.

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Technique Class: On the Grill: Starters and Sides

Tips for the Perfect Barbecue

Chill the drinks: Few things are better than a frosty beer or ice-cold tea, so keep all drinks on ice and in a shady area.

Get great ingredients: Select foods that are in season, such as sweet corn or fresh peaches, and buy locally for the best flavor. When purchasing meat, choose hormone free and organic whenever possible. Seek out a reputable local butcher.

Keep foods fresh: If leaving food out for a long period of time, cover it up with mesh screens to avoid pesky critters and keep out of the sunlight to avoid spoilage. If there is a problem with bugs, set all the food up indoors buffet-style and let guests serve themselves.

Make things comfortable: Be sure to have plenty of seats scattered around the yard so everyone has a place to sit.

Set a casual table: A backyard barbecue doesn't require your best wares, but have enough plates and utensils for everyone. Place serving spoons and forks alongside your serving bowls and platters.

Drink stations: Set up satellite drink stations throughout the backyard. Have one that's alcohol free for the little ones and another with prepared mixed drinks, or a cooler filled with beer, water and ice. This makes it easy for guests to serve themselves and stay hydrated.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *On the Grill*, by Willie Cooper (Oxmoor House, 2009).

The Key to Grilling Vegetables

The high heat of the fire brings out the natural sugars in vegetables while infusing smoke flavor into their flesh, making for delicious eating. Grilling vegetables also keeps their flavors fresh and preserves vitamins and minerals, which can be lost when vegetables are cooked in water.

Select the freshest vegetables available and cook them briefly and simply to conserve their distinctive flavors and nutrients. Watch them closely when grilling, test them for doneness with a sharp knife or skewer (better yet, taste a piece), and take them off the grill the moment they are done.

Grilled Pineapple Salsa

Perked up with jalapeño and fresh mint, this salsa is delicious with chicken legs and meaty fish.

Prepare a hot fire in a grill. Brush and oil the grill grate.

Drizzle the pineapple and onion slices with olive oil, then place on the grill with the jalapeño. Cook the pineapple and onion slices, turning once, until they are grilled marked and heated through, about 8 minutes total. Cook the chili, turning, until charred on all sides.

Transfer the pineapple, onion and chili to a cutting board. Chop the pineapple and onion into chunks and place in a bowl. When the chili is cool enough to handle, peel, stem, seed and dice it, then add it to the bowl. Add the avocado and mint and stir to mix. Add the lime juice, stir again and season with salt.

Use the salsa immediately, or cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days. Bring to room temperature before serving. Makes about 1 cup.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Grill Master*, by Fred Thompson (Weldon Owen, 2011).

Black Bean Salad

This black bean salad is best served when the vegetables are still slightly warm from the grill, or at room temperature within 1 to 2 hours of grilling. The beans and vegetables should be mildly spiced and glistening with the vinaigrette.

To make the vinaigrette, in a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lime juice, vinegar, cumin, chili powder, salt, pepper and a few dashes of hot-pepper sauce.

Prepare a medium-hot fire in a grill. Brush and oil the grill grate or a vegetable-grilling basket.

Brush the yellow onions, bell peppers and chilies with olive oil. Arrange the yellow onions, bell peppers and chilies on the grill or in the vegetable-grilling basket over the hottest part of the fire. Grill, turning occasionally, until well charred on all sides, about 10 minutes total.

Transfer the grilled vegetables to a bowl, cover and let steam for 10 minutes. Pick over the vegetables, removing most of the burned skin but leaving some charred bits. Dice the vegetables to a uniform size and place in a large salad bowl.

Add the black beans, cilantro, red onion and vinaigrette and toss to coat evenly. Serve warm or at room temperature. Serves 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *On the Grill*, by Willie Cooper (Oxmoor House, 2009).

