

BUILD YOUR OWN SALAD

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I remember a friend staying with me shortly after I'd turned to a plant-based lifestyle.

An omnivore themselves, they opted to eat out or get takeaway that suited their diet choice, but one night I asked if they'd like to have the salad I was making for myself.

"Salad?" they inquired. They couldn't believe that I'd only have salad for dinner, though they did take me up on the offer and, though I say it myself, were more than grateful they did!

You see, there's salad, and then there's a proper, balanced, plant-based salad that is a complete and nourishing meal.

Most people think of salad as little more than lettuce, cucumber and tomato on the side, but done right, a salad can be as good as any pasta, pie or paella!

Here's a five-step guide to building a better salad:



START WITH GREENS

Every salad starts with some foliage, and when you start paying attention, you'll find there are lots of options open to you. Tangy lettuces, peppery arugula, tasty baby spinach, crunchy cabbage or hearty kale - try out a few and see which ones you prefer.

Personally, I like the freshness of an arugula-spinach combo, with a bit of kale mixed in. Kale and other dark leafy greens are high in iron and fibre, and excellent for a plant-based diet, but they're often quite tough and can be hard to digest properly. Chop it up small and massage with a little bit of apple cider vinegar and olive oil. This breaks down the fibres for easier digestion and adds a nice added tang to your salad.

PILE ON YOUR FILLERS

'Fillers' are what I call the more conventional salad ingredients; cucumber, tomatoes, radishes, celery, grated carrots and beets, and fresh beans (green beans, snow peas and so on). They're fresh and healthy and good for bulking out a salad, but aren't key nutritional components. Slice some fresh corn off the cob, even dice up an apple - you can go crazy with fillers and get as imaginative as you want. Try adding steamed veggies or lightly boiled potatoes; just make sure to undercook them a bit and allow them to cool so they're still firm and fresh in your salad.

ADD A PROTEIN

...or three! Protein, while present in lots of vegetables, is often under-represented in salads, but there are a bunch of good protein sources that work perfectly. Cooked beans and pulses - including kidney beans, lima beans, black beans and chickpeas - are excellent for bringing up your protein quotient, but you don't have to stop there.

There are plenty of marinated tofus, grilled tempeh, plant-based chick'n strips and so many other options. Take a look at my [blog on plant-based meat substitutes](#) for some ideas.

You can add multiple protein sources, and it's often beneficial to as our bodies absorb different proteins in different ways and each source contains different amino acids - the building blocks of protein, so you'll increase your intake overall.

GARNISH UP

Your salad will already have quite a bit of flavor to it, but your garnishing is where the flavor bursts happen. Sliced olives and sun-dried tomatoes are my go-to. If your tomatoes are in oil, pour off a little of the oil into a jar to mix up a dressing. Kraut or kimchi also make great garnishes. Packed with probiotics, they help to create healthy digestion and gut function, but the tangy flavor also packs a punch to any salad.

Any kind of pickles, while not probiotic, also give the same taste benefits.

Sliced onion is a good additional garnish, if you're into it. If you want something a bit more substantial, you can try out some of the many vegan cheeses available, Diced, grated or crumbled, they're a nice little bonus on top of any salad.

Nuts and seeds provide a bit more protein, plus essential omega oils for brain function. Select a few - almonds, hazelnuts, sunflower or pumpkin seeds, flax or hemp seeds - there's heaps to choose from. Put them in a small bowl, mix with a pinch of salt plus any spices (Cajun seasoning and smoked paprika are some of my favorites), and either dry-fry or spread out on a baking tray and place in a medium-high oven for around ten minutes, for a lovely toasted topping. WATCH THEM CAREFULLY! The cook fast and turn quickly, so keep checking and stirring them couple of minutes.

Fresh sprouts are another good topper and packed with vital nutrients. They add a nice, fresh crunch to any salad.

GET DRESSED

There are stacks of vegan dressings available, including mayonnaise, ranch dressing, chipotle dressing and conventional salad dressings.

I tend to avoid them as a lot of them are pretty high in sugar, and it's super-easy to make your own.

For a simple salad dressing, a good olive oil and balsamic vinegar is all you need. Get fancy with some cracked black pepper, fresh rosemary and a teaspoon of Dijon or wholegrain mustard.

For something a bit heavier, my simple satay is a winner. Equal quantities - about a tablespoon - each of peanut butter (pick a 100-percent-nut one, no added salt or sugar), sweet chili sauce and olive oil, plus a bit of cracked pepper. Mix well with a fork or in a blender and pour over. The peanuts also give another protein bonus.

You can even just drizzle some of that sundried tomato oil over the top and keep it real simple.

So there you have it - a real salad that will nourish and satisfy, plus give you a whole bunch of health benefits.

Save or print out my Build Your Own Salad chart on the next page and keep it to hand for reference whenever you want to whip a delicious, nutritious salad of your own.

- Bryan Dennstedt, Real Men Eat Plants



BUILD YOUR OWN SALAD

This list of example ingredients is only the beginning. Get imaginative and add your own ingredients, making sure you are getting roughly the same proportions of each column as listed below:

START WITH GREENS choose 3	LOAD YOUR FILLERS choose 5	ADD SOME PROTEIN choose 1-2	GARNISH UP choose 3	GET DRESSED choose 1
Lettuce	Cucumber	Tofu	Sun-Dried Tomatoes	Ranch Dressing
- iceberg	Tomatoes	Tempeh	Sliced Olives	Pesto
- romaine	Celery	Seitan	Artichoke Hearts	Olive Oil
- Boston	Beets	Diced Veggie Patty	Peanuts	Mayonnaise
- radicchio	Carrots	Sliced Veg Sausage	Diced or Grated Cheez	Satay Dressing
Baby Spinach	Green Beans	Tinned beans or pulses	Kraut, Kimchi or Pickles	(equal parts peanut butter, olive oil & sweet chili sauce)
Arugula	Snow Peas	- black beans	Toasted Nuts & Seeds	Vinaigrette
Shredded Cabbage	Steamed Broccoli	- kidney beans	- almonds	(1 part balsamic vinegar, 2 parts olive oil, black pepper)
Kale (tossed in vinegar)	Boiled Potatoes	- lentils	- pinenuts	
	Fresh Corn	- chickpeas	- hazelnuts	
		- lima beans	- sunflower seeds	
			- pumpkin seeds	
			- hemp or flax seeds	