

## EATING &amp; DRINKING

By GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

**L**ATELY I HAVE noticed fundamental changes to my salad-making approach. Once all the ingredients are prepped and ready to be put together, more often than not, I reach for a serving platter instead of a salad bowl.

It was a gradual evolution. As my salads have incorporated more variety—ingredients such as roasted, shaved or cured vegetables; chunks of cheese and other proteins; fruit, nuts, seeds; spice blends; thick dressings that border on dips—I've started plating them like the full-fledged meals they are. I've realized I prefer to see the ingredients spread out on a platter so I can pick and choose what I want to put on my plate. I also admire the beautiful mosaic of things I like to eat.

It turns out I'm not the only one. Once I identified my penchant for platter salads, I noticed them in cookbooks, in restaurants, at the homes of friends and, yes, on Instagram. I contacted Ilene Rosen, author of the cookbook "Saladish," to ask what she thought of this lateral development. Ms. Rosen spent her decades-long career as a contemplator and composer of salads, first at City Bakery in Manhattan and later at her own specialty grocery shop, R&D Foods, in Brooklyn. "Maybe it's just bowl backlash," she offered. "There was so much about bowls—everything going in a bowl, and being layered up in a bowl, and the egg on top of the bowl."

As opposed to tossing a pile of components together willy-nilly, assembling a salad horizontally gives you control. Whether you're nestling ingredients in clusters, as you would with a composed salad, or placing them intermittently on a serving dish and building the salad that way, there's an intention there the bowl model typically lacks. How you choose to layer your ingredients dictates how they'll come together as a bite. Think about it like sandwich construction. You place the ingredients one by one, putting serious thought into the order, with the ultimate mouthful in mind.

"There's always the star of the show, right?" said Joshua McFadden, author of the cookbook "Six Seasons" and chef-owner of Ava Gene's in Portland, Ore. "Figure out whatever that is, and have things that go with that and accentuate it. There's always acid, there's always texture, and there's always fat. It's just figuring out what those are." Acid could be lemon juice, vinegar or fish sauce; textural elements could be croutons or crunchy vegetables; fat might come by way



Baby Gem With Muhammara, Pickled Red Onion and Feta



Watermelon With Chrysanthemum and Shiso



Squash Ribbons With Tomatoes, Peanuts, Basil and Mint



String Beans, Tomatoes, Cucumbers and Olives on Tonnato

## Superior Salad Architecture

Think of them as platters à la Frank Lloyd Wright: low slung, well crafted, harmonious

of yogurt, cheese or a creamy dressing. Mr. McFadden's riff on a salade niçoise is plated on tonnato sauce, a creamy tuna mayonnaise, spread over a large platter. It's the flavor anchor and the literal foundation of the dish.

Plattering also solves the pesky problem of heavier morsels—often the tastiest ones, such as olives, bits of salami or cheese, or chunky vegetables—sinking to the depths. "If they're spread out,

you're not continually reaching to the bottom of the bowl," said Ms. Rosen. In a deep vessel, delicate greens and herbs are equally at risk—they can wilt if over-dressed or get crushed under the weight of other ingredients. On a platter, Ms. Rosen layers fragile greens among heartier vegetables to gently incorporate them. "When it's done, it looks like you mixed it, but there's no mixing involved,"

she said. "So they keep their shape and crispness and all of that."

Another advantage of a layered salad: precise seasoning. Each layer can get a bespoke dressing, whether it's a sprinkling of salt and pepper, a drizzle of olive oil, a more substantial sauce or a combination of the three. A platter also eliminates the problem of dressing pooling at the bottom of the bowl.

According to London chef

Yotam Ottolenghi, whose cookbooks and chain of cafés helped propel vegetables onto the A-list, a good layering technique allows for the strategic injection of flavor, color and texture without muddling of any kind. When Mr. Ottolenghi combines gem lettuce wedges with muhamarra (a brick-red roasted-pepper-and-walnut sauce), pickled onions and feta cheese, he dollops the thick dressing over the let-

tuce for visual effect. "It's the concept of layering the leaves, dressing them lightly and spooning the sauce on top rather than tossing, so it doesn't all go a uniform red," said Mr. Ottolenghi. "That wouldn't be as attractive as creating a contrast between the solid red and solid green."

Ultimately, a horizontal salad is a celebration of ingredients. "I do think it's important to see all the things, because for me these are all the things I love," said Ms. Rosen. "Why wouldn't you want to give each thing its due?"

Find recipes for watermelon with chrysanthemum and shiso; baby gem lettuce with muhammara dressing, pickled red onion and feta; and string beans, pickled beans, tomatoes, cucumbers and olives on tonnato at [wsj.com/food](http://wsj.com/food).

**Squash Ribbons With Tomatoes, Peanuts, Basil, Mint and Spicy Fish-Sauce Sauce**

Set aside time to make the sauce a day ahead, to let the flavors develop. The recipe makes enough sauce for several salads and will keep a month or two in the fridge.

**Active Time:** 25 minutes  
**Total Time:** 1 day (if making sauce ahead)  
**Serves:** 4

Make the spicy fish-sauce sauce: In a small bowl, stir together  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup seeded, de-ribbed and minced chiles (use a mix of colors), 4 large cloves garlic, minced,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup fish sauce,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup white wine vinegar and 2 tablespoons sugar until sugar dissolves. Ideally, make this a day ahead and readjust seasonings to taste on the second day. It is likely to get spicier. // Prepare the Zucchini: Use a mandoline to carefully slice 4 firm medium zucchini (or mix of zucchini and summer squash) from bottom to top to create very thin ribbons. (If you don't have a mandoline, cut the zucchini into very thin rounds.) In a colander, toss sliced zucchini with 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Let sit 30 minutes. Blot zucchini on paper towels to remove moisture and excess salt. Transfer to a large bowl. // Assemble the salad: Trim 1 bunch scallions and slice on a sharp angle, then soak in ice water 20 minutes. Drain well. Add scallions to bowl with zucchini along with 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup salted roasted peanuts, roughly chopped, 1 small handful basil leaves and 1 small handful mint leaves, and toss together. Pour in  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup spicy fish-sauce sauce and toss again. Add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup olive oil and toss again. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Arrange on a platter or individual plates, and serve right away.

—Adapted from "Six Seasons" by Joshua McFadden

**FIRM YES** Cubed and skewered, Bread Cheese makes a marvelous meatless option for the grill.



CHEESE WISELY

## Mild, Tangy, Supple, Summery

Delicious cheeses made for grilling are poised to catch fire

**IN THE U.S.**, where we fixate on the pornographic ooze of melted cheese, "grilling cheeses"—high-protein slabs that resist melt no matter the temperature—remain underutilized, despite the delicious options now available. Across Europe, meanwhile, Greek halloumi stars in everything from salads to shawarma. In the southern Americas, dense, non-melting cheeses feature in tacos (Mexico) and as part of asado spreads (Argentina). In India, firm paneer can go savory or sweet.

Grilling cheeses make up for their obstinate resistance to melting by adapting to all kinds of flavors and attaining crisp exteriors and warm, supple interiors via quick cooking. Mild, with a gentle lactic flavor punctuated by a yogurty tang, they're tasty without any gussy-ing up, but they truly shine when served with zippy dipping sauces. This summer I've been making a scallion almond sauce (recipe at right) to serve with Bread Cheese (origin name: *Juustoleipä*), a Wisconsin favorite with a browned top like the crust on bread, borrowed from Norwegian and Finnish cheese traditions.

You don't actually need to grill grilling cheeses, but you do need to cook them quickly on medium-high heat; a cast-iron or nonstick pan works well. Lightly oil the grill or pan, cook the cheese until it browns and serve immediately. For grilling, it's best to leave the cheese whole or thread cubes onto skewers so you don't lose any through the grates. However you slice it, it's a solid choice for barbecue season. —Tia Keenan

**Scallion Almond Sauce**

**Total time:** 5 minutes  
**Makes:** 1 cup

In a food processor or blender, combine 1 bunch scallions, chopped,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup toasted almonds, 2 cloves garlic, 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise (preferably Kewpie), 1 tablespoon soy sauce, 1 tablespoon honey,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cumin,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt,  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon red pepper flakes,  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon dried coriander and  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup extra virgin olive oil. Process until smooth. Serve with everything.

**SO HOT RIGHT NOW** / 3 GREAT GRILLABLE CHEESES

**Narragansett Creamery Grilling Cheese** (\$8 for 8 ounces, [saxelbycheese.com](http://saxelbycheese.com))

**Carr Valley Bread Cheese** (\$13 for 10 ounces, [carrvalleycheese.com](http://carrvalleycheese.com))

**Dayspring Dairy Halloumi** (\$17 for 8 ounces, [dayspringdairy.com](http://dayspringdairy.com))