

Vinaigrettes 101

It's important to know how to build a solid vinaigrette so that when you start cranking out salads this summer, you have a favorable result instead of one or two disappointments which cause you to neglect the greens until they end up a brown sludge at the bottom of the crisper drawer. I consulted the "Cook Illustrated: Science of Good Cooking" book to get the definite how to. According to their research, the "dump and shake" method of pouring all the salad dressing ingredients into a jar, slapping on a lid and shaking doesn't really work. It doesn't provide a complete emulsion and you'll need to break out a whisk for that because only a whisk can break down the oil and vinegar particles enough that they are able to mix thoroughly. If you don't mind oddly greasy leaves and would rather shake, then shake! But be aware that whisking is how you get a dressing that is unified, silky and lovely.

I also learned that without an emulsifier (which include mustard/mayonnaise/egg yolks), you cannot get a completely stable vinaigrette. The emulsifier roughs up the surface of the two liquids so that they can break down and combine easier. Not a fan of traditional mayonnaise, I keep a tube of vegan garlic mayonnaise in the fridge just to use an emulsifier for dressings.

TWO RANDOM TIPS: these come from The Splendid Table's "How to Eat Supper" book. They suggest rubbing the serving bowl for salad with a split clove of garlic before adding the vegetables, just to give a hint of flavor. Another suggestion is adding a splash of fish sauce to vinaigrette, it doesn't taste overly "fishy" it just adds a nice richness to the flavor. Cesar salad dressing typically features anchovies, so this makes absolute sense.

Here is the Cook's Illustrated "Foolproof Vinaigrette" which is a good base recipe that you can modify with additional fresh herbs or different oils and vinegars. Enjoy!

1 TB wine vinegar
1 ½ tsp minced shallot
½ tsp mayonnaise
½ Dijon mustard
½ tsp salt
Pepper
3 TB extra virgin olive oil

Combine vinegar, shallot, mayonnaise, mustard, salt, pepper to taste in a small bowl. Whisk until milky in appearance and no lumps remain.

Place oil in a small measuring cup so that it is easy to pour. Whisking constantly, very slowly drizzle olive oil into the vinegar mixture. If pools of oil form, stop adding oil and mix well before adding more oil. Vinaigrette should be glossy and lightly thickened. It can be refrigerated for up to two weeks.

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