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LEARN THIS RECIPE AND YOU'LL NEVER BUY A BOTTLE OF SALAD DRESSING AGAIN

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Once you start making your own salad dressings, you'll never go back. You can make a great vinaigrette with as few as three ingredients you probably already have in your pantry—and the result is superior to anything you'll find on a store shelf.

The right vinaigrette enhances the different ingredients in a salad; it can also brighten a dull salad or tame one with sharp flavors. For it to succeed, it needs to balance three basic elements.

The 3 Basic Elements: Oil, Acid and Seasonings

Oils and other fats, like warm tendered bacon fat, balance the acid and add a soft sheen to the salad. Extra-virgin olive oil is the classic, but you should also experiment with nut oils like walnut and hazelnut or Asian sesame oil. It's a good idea to keep two olive oils in your pantry: one for cooking, and a high-quality one for dressings.

Acids, which add brightness, include vinegars (balsamic and wine-based white, champagne, red, verjus, sherry or rice) or citrus juice (lemon, lime, orange or grapefruit). Soy sauce and rice vinegar are often the right match for Asian-inspired salads.

Seasonings add depth to the acid-fat foundation. Salt and freshly ground black pepper are traditional additions, but there's no shortage of possibilities: a pinch of a fresh or dried herb, minced shallots, or a teaspoon or two of Dijon mustard for body, a hot spice like cayenne, or a touch of sweetness from honey or maple syrup. Try chopped capers or anchovies to build flavor, too.



Ratio

The commonly accepted ratio for a vinaigrette is three parts oil to one part vinegar. We recommend starting with two parts oil to one part vinegar, then start tasting, because the perfect ratio really depends on the ingredients you're using. Some oils are more acidic, some more piquant; some vinegars are softer, and some are sweeter. But the real question is...

Should You Whisk, Shake or Blend?

There's no right answer, and each emulsifying technique has its benefits. Whisking offers the most control, blending is the fastest method, and shaking is the most mess-free and requires the least amount of cleanup.

Whisk: Traditionally, professional cooks are taught to make dressing by adding the oil last in a slow, steady stream while whisking vigorously. First, combine all of your ingredients *except* the oil in a small bowl and whisk together. Then, gradually add the oil while whisking rapidly in a circular motion—as you whisk, the ingredients will emulsify and gradually thicken.

Shake: Alternatively, you can simply add all of your vinaigrette ingredients to a jar and shake (play some music for inspiration!)