

## Seventeenth Century English Salads

by Cathy K. Kaufman

Although nicknamed the very carnivorous-sounding “beefeaters,” the English have a long, proud tradition of salads. The first salad recipe that I am aware of in the English culinary canon (putting aside anything from the Roman occupation of Britain) appears in *The Forme Of Cury* (ca. 1390), written by the cooks to Richard II, the “royallest vyander of all Christian kings.” This salad, a litany of fresh herbs, garlic, onions, fennel, and greens, dressed only with “rawe” oil, vinegar, and salt, would be at home on any contemporary table—save for the fact that most modern greengrocers do not carry the full complement of herbs specified, such as rue and borage.

Many more salad recipes are recorded during the glory days of English cookery, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The English used the term salad broadly to encompass a wide range of vegetable dishes, from very simple recipes that are still popular today, such as pickled cucumbers, to “boiled” salads, to “grand sallats,” raw greens accented with dried and candied fruits, cooked eggs, and capers. The “Grand Sallets,” (the spelling varies with the source) are stunning, visually ornate, and flavorful dishes that presage the “vertical cuisine” popularized in chic, late twentieth century restaurants such as Alfred Portale’s Gotham Bar and Grill. The seventeenth century instructions for assembling the salad are as complex as any given to a modern line cook for presenting “architectural” food, and the results are every bit as breathtaking.

Gervase Markham’s *The English Housewife* (1615) shows the importance of salads on the early seventeenth century English table and the meticulous attention to the beautiful presentation of foods. Markham instructs the housewife (a “housewife” in this context means a gentry lady living on a country estate) hostessing an important dinner to “first marshall her sallats, delivering the grand sallat first, which is ever more compound, then green sallats, then boiled sallats, then smaller compound sallats. Next unto sallats she shall deliver forth all her fricassees. . . .” The delivery of food to the table could become almost theatrical in its choreography, with the server following a specific regimen of distributing the dishes. The guests would be assembled at table and then the server

shall not set them down as he received them, but, setting the sallats extravagantly around the table, mix the fricasees about them; then the boiled meats amongst the fricasees, roast meats amongst the boiled . . . so that before every trencher may stand a sallat, a fricassee, a boiled meat, a roast meat, a baked meat and a carbonado, which will give a most comely beauty to the table and a very great contentment to the guest.

I have not modernized the spellings in the recipes, but the English is easy enough to follow. Keep in mind that in the days before the centerpiece, some of the dishes were used, in Markham’s own words, “for show,” and “to adorn” the table. This may explain why there is no recipe for a dressing accompanying John Murrell’s “Grand Sallat:” it may have been part of the table frippery. I have added a dressing based on the instructions

found in Markham for raw salads (he recommends sugar, vinegar and salad oil), but any basic vinaigrette would do. The salad is delicious and substantial, and would make a wonderful starter to a autumn meal.

### To Make a Grand Sallet

[John Murrell, *The Second Booke of Cookery and Carving*, 1638]



*Take the buds of al kind of good Hearbes and a hanfull of French Capers, seven or eight Dates cut in long slices, a hanfull of Raisins of the Sun, the stones being pickt out, a hanfull of Almonds blancht, a hanfull of Curans, five or six Figs sliced, a preserved orange cut in slices; mingle al these together with a handful of Sugar, then take a faire Dish fit for a shoulder of Mutton, set a standard of paste in the midst of it, put your aforesaid sallet about this standard, set upon your sallet foure half Lemmons, with the flat ends downward, right over against one another, halves way betwixt your standard and the dishes side, pricke*

*in every one of these Lemmons a branch of Rosemary and hang upon the Rosemary preserved cherries, or cherries fresh from the tree; set foure halfe Egges, being roasted hart, betwaene your Lemons, the flat ends downward, prick upon your Egges sliced Dates and Almonds: then you may lay another garnish betweene the brim of the Dish and the Sallet, of quarters of hard Egges and round slices of Lemmons: then you may garnish up the brim of the Dish with a preserved Orenge, in long slices and betwixt every slice of orange, a little heap of French Capers. If you have not a standard to serue it in, then take halfe a Lemmon, and a faire branch of Rosemary.*

For the salad:

6 eggs  
¾ lb mesclun mix  
leaves from 5 sprigs of tarragon  
leaves from 2 sprigs marjoram  
leaves from 4 sprigs washed and dried parsley  
¾ cup drained capers  
8 dried dates cut in fine julienne  
3 Tablespoons candied orange rind, julienned  
1 cup slivered almonds, lightly toasted  
5 dried figs, cut in fine julienne  
½ cup dried currants  
6 lemons  
6 branches rosemary  
¼ lb. fresh cherries or 6 candied cherries

For the vinaigrette:

¼ cup wine or sherry vinegar  
2 t sugar  
salt and pepper to taste  
¾ cup mild olive oil

1. Place the eggs in a sauce pan and cover them with cold water by one inch. Bring the pan to the boil, cover it and remove from the heat. Let the eggs cook off the heat for 13 minutes, then drain and refresh them under cold water, cracking the shells to make peeling easier. Cut 4 of the eggs in half, the remaining two in quarters, and reserve.

2. Combine the mesclun, herbs, half of the capers, half of the julienned dates, candied orange, and almonds, and all of the figs and currants in a large bowl. Set aside in the refrigerator until serving time.
3. Cut 4 of the lemons in half, and slice the remaining two into thin rounds. Reserve.
4. Make a vinaigrette by mixing together the oil and vinegar. Adjust the seasoning with the salt, pepper and sugar.
5. To assemble the salad: Use a large round platter and invert a small stainless bowl in the center. Toss the mesclun mix with the vinaigrette and mound the dressed greens over the bowl. Alternate the lemon and egg halves (cut side down on both) next to the salad around the platter; garnish the lemons with rosemary skewers with a cherry impaled (or hanging) on the end, and the eggs with slivered dates and almonds. Then alternate your lemon slices and egg quarters around the edge of the platter, garnishing with little piles of capers and julienned candied orange.

### **Pickled Cucumber Sallat**

[Gervase Markham, *The English Housewife*, 1615]

*Your preserved sallats are of two kinds, either pickled, as are cucumbers, samphire, purslane, broom and such like, or preserved with vinegar, as violets, primrose, cowslips, gillyflowers of all kinds, broom flowers, and for the most part any wholesome flower whatsoever.*

*Now for pickling of sallats, they are only boiled, and then drained from the water, spread upon a table, and a good store of salt thrown over them, then when they are thorough cold, make a pickle with water, salt and a little vinegar, and with the same pot them up in close earthen pots and serve them forth as occasion shall serve.*

2 cucumbers  
 1 T salt  
 2 t water  
 2 T white wine vinegar  
 pepper to taste  
 sugar to taste, optional  
 additional salt, if needed

1. Peel the cucumbers and cut them in half lengthwise. Remove the seeds and slice the cucumbers into half moon shapes about ¼ inch thick. Bring a pot of water to the boil and add the cucumbers. Cook for 1 minute and drain. Transfer to a large bowl, sprinkle with the 1 tablespoon salt and let cool.
2. Combine the water and vinegar in a bowl. Pour over the cucumbers and let macerate. Adjust the seasoning with additional salt, if needed.

### **An excellent boiled sallat**

[Gervase Markham, *The English Housewife*, 1615]

*To make an excellent compound boiled sallat: take of spinach well washed two or three handfules, and put into fair water, and boil it till it be exceedingly soft, and tender as pap; then put it into a colander and drain the water from it; which done, with the backside of your chopping knife chop it, and bruise it as small as may be: then put it into a pipkin with a good lump of sweet butter, and boil it over again; then take a good handful of currants clean washed, and put to it, and stir them well together; then put to as*

*much vinegar as will make it reasonable tart, and then with sugar season it according to the taste of the master of the house, and so serve it upon sippets.*

### **To Make Fried Toast of Spinach**

[Thomas Dawson, *The Good Huswife's Jewell*, 1596]

*Take spinach and seethe it in water and salt. When it is tender, wring out the water between two trenchers. Then chop it small and set it on a chafing dish of coals. Put thereto butter, small raisins, cinnamon, ginger, sugar, a little of the juice of an orange, and two yolks of raw eggs. Let it boil till it be somewhat thick. Then toast your toast, soak them in a little butter and sugar and spread thin your spinach upon them. Set them on a dish before the fire a little while. So serve them with a little sugar upon them.*

**2 bunches spinach**

**6 T butter, divided into equal portions**

**½ cup raisins, chopped**

**2 t ground cinnamon, optional**

**1 t ground ginger, optional**

**2 T sugar**

**orange juice or vinegar to taste, about 2 T**

**8 slices fine-grained bread, crusts trimmed and lightly toasted for 10 minutes in a 350° F oven**

- 1. Thoroughly clean the spinach by soaking repeatedly in cold water until no trace of sand is left. Remove the coarse stems by folding the leaves in half lengthwise and pulling down on the stems. Blanche the spinach in a pot of lightly salted boiling water for 1 minute. Rinse under cold water to stop the cooking and drain thoroughly, squeezing to extract all of the moisture. Finely chop the spinach and squeeze again to remove any additional moisture.**
- 2. Melt 3 tablespoons of the butter in a sauté pan and add the spinach, raisins, optional spices, if using, 1 tablespoon of the sugar and the orange juice or vinegar. Cook for until very tender.**
- 3. Spread the toast with the remaining butter and sprinkle with 1 tablespoon of sugar. Spread a layer of spinach over each of the toasts and cut into triangles. Sprinkle with the remaining sugar. Just before serving, warm in a preheated 350° F oven for 5-7 minutes.**