

Radicchio Salad

1 small head radicchio (2 ounces)
1 teaspoon olive oil
1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard.
1. Trim, wash and separate leaves of radicchio.

2. Whisk together oil, vinegar and mustard in serving bowl; add radicchio, and stir to coat well.

Yield: 2 servings.

Approximate nutritional analysis per serving: 30 calories, 2 grams fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 40 milligrams sodium, 0 grams protein, 2 grams carbohydrate.

Grilled Asparagus With Egg And Caper Sauce

2 pounds thick asparagus
Light olive oil for grilling

Salt

2 hard-cooked eggs, whites and yolks separated

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 to 3 tablespoons tarragon or champagne vinegar

2 tablespoons capers, rinsed

1 large shallot, finely diced

Freshly ground pepper

Chervil or parsley, finely chopped

Few handfuls red mustard leaves, optional

1. Break off tough ends of asparagus and even ends with knife. Parboil in boiling salted water about a minute, then rinse to stop cooking and drain. Coat stalks lightly with olive oil for grilling. Season with salt and grill over slow fire, turning asparagus so that they cook evenly on all sides. To test for doneness, pierce stalks with sharp point of knife; they should be firm but knife should penetrate easily.

2. To make sauce, separately chop cooked egg whites and yolks. Combine eggs, oil, vinegar, capers, shallots, salt and pepper to taste and chervil in bowl and gently combine with rubber scraper. Yolks and oil will gradually emulsify to give sauce body.

3. Arrange grilled asparagus on platter or individual plates lined with red mustard leaves. Ladle sauce over all and serve. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

This salad also makes a beautiful opening to a meal, or combined with some dressed greens and perhaps some hard-cooked eggs it might be offered as a meal in itself. The sauce can be made ahead of time, the orange juice and vinegar added at the very end so that the greens remain bright and snappy. Since the pickled onions take only a minute or two to prepare, start with them if you haven't any on hand. They will have colored by the time you're ready for them. This sauce is also good over grilled asparagus.

Asparagus Salad With Green Sauce and Pickled Onions

2 pounds thick or thin asparagus
Salt

1/4 cup chopped parsley or chervil

1 tablespoon capers, rinsed

1 wide band orange zest, cut into fine slivers and blanched 10 seconds

Several tablespoons drained and finely diced pickled onion rings (recipe follows)

4 to 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1/4 teaspoon mustard

1 tablespoon fresh orange juice

White wine or champagne vinegar to taste

Freshly ground pepper

Chive blossoms, optional

1. Trim asparagus by snapping off tough ends. If asparagus is thick, peel stalks. Bring several quarts water to boil, add salt and asparagus and cook until bright green, tender, but still a little firm, about 3 minutes for thin asparagus or 5 minutes for thick. When done, rinse asparagus briefly in cool water, then set stalks on towel to drain while you make sauce.

2. Combine parsley and capers in bowl with half the orange zest slivers and half the finely diced pickled onions. Stir in oil, mustard, orange juice and vinegar. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

3. Arrange asparagus on platter or individual serving plates. Ladle sauce over and garnish with remaining orange peel and pickled onions. Scatter a few chive blossoms over all. Makes 4 servings for a first course, 2 or 3 as main course.

(For variation, make salad with good scented sesame or peanut oil, or with mixture of walnut and olive oils. These flavors all go well with asparagus and harmonize with the orange. Substitute cilantro for the parsley if you like.)

These pretty pink onions enliven everything — salads of all kinds, sandwiches, cold pasta or rice dishes, and eggs. They're also great just to serve alongside whatever else is on the table. They'll keep well, refrigerated, a week or longer.

Pickled Red Onion Rings

1 pound red onions

About 1 quart boiling water

1 cup white wine vinegar

1 cup cold water

1 tablespoon sugar

Several dashes salt

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon mixed peppercorns, slightly crushed

Few fresh marjoram or thyme branches or few dashes dried

Slice onions into thin rounds. Separate rounds and place in colander. Pour boiling water over them, then place onions in bowl along with vinegar, cold water, sugar, salt, bay leaves, peppercorns and marjoram. Cover and refrigerate. Color will begin to infuse in about 15 minutes. Makes 2 cups.

The success of this last dish depends entirely on the quality of the ingredients, particularly the oil, which should be one of those peanut oils that has the heady fragrance of freshly roasted peanuts. For variety, try using cilantro instead of parsley and garnish the asparagus with toasted black sesame seeds.