Show-stopping toppers

A healthy twist on familiar favourites

Irene McGuinness | photos Scott Yavis

Some of the healthiest food choices can be sabotaged when you top them with ingredients that are high in fat, calories, or salt. Instead, try these dressed-up recipes that will boost your nutrient intake without adding unhealthy amounts of fat and calories.

We've enhanced a few basic recipes, making them simple, nutritious, and quick to prepare. Post them in your kitchen for easy reference, and you'll soon be adding your own healthy topper ideas.

ROCKET GREENS, GRAPES, GOAT CHEESE, AND HEMP HEARTS

1 Tbsp (15 mL) freshly squeezed lemon juice
2 tsp (10 mL) Dijon mustard
3 Tbsp (45 mL) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 - 10 oz (300 g) package baby arugula leaves, washed and dried
3/4 cup (180 mL) seedless red grapes, halved
2 oz (60 g) plain goat cheese, crumbled
2 Tbsp (30 mL) capers, rinsed and drained
1/4 cup (60 mL) hemp hearts

Combine lemon juice, mustard, oil, and seasonings in bowl. Whisk to blend. Add arugula leaves and gently toss with dressing to coat. Sprinkle with grapes, goat cheese, capers, and hemp hearts.

Serves 4.

EACH SERVING CONTAINS:
185 calories; 4.5 g protein; 16 g fat (5.9 g sat. fat, 0 g trans fat); 4.1 g carbohydrates; 0 g fibre; 233 mg sodium
PEAR AND PUMPKIN SEED SALAD

1 head Bibb lettuce, washed and spun dry
2 unpeeled Anjou pears, cored and thinly sliced
1/4 cup [60 mL] coarsely grated goat Gouda or crumbled goat blue cheese
3 Tbsp [45 mL] extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbsp [30 mL] pear vinaigrette
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1/4 cup [60 mL] pumpkin seeds, lightly toasted

Tear lettuce into bite-size pieces. Divide among 4 salad plates. Add pears and cheese. Whisk oil and vinaigrette, adding salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle over salad. Sprinkle with pumpkin seeds.
Serves 4.

EACH SERVING CONTAINS:
173 calories; 13.2 g protein; 4 g fat [1.5 g sat. fat, 0 g trans fat]; 8 g carbohydrates; 0.3 g fibre; 25 mg sodium
FOOD

QUINOA AND DULSE SALAD

1 cup (250 mL) quinoa
2 cups (500 mL) water
1/4 tsp (1 mL) salt
1 cup (250 mL) thin green beans, trimmed
2 Tbsp (30 mL) extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp (10 mL) freshly squeezed lemon juice
1/2 English cucumber, cut into thin julienne strips
1/2 cup (125 mL) dulse fronds or 1/4 cup (60 mL) dulse flakes
2 green onions, chopped
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
Carrot curls

Drain and rinse quinoa. Cook quinoa in boiling salted water for 15 minutes or until grains are tender but still crunchy. Rinse in cold water. Drain and set aside.

Blanch beans in boiling water just until bright green but still crisp. Rinse in cold water. Drain and set aside.

Combine oil and lemon juice in large bowl. Whisk to blend. Add quinoa, beans, cucumber, dulse, and green onions. Gently toss together until evenly mixed. Add pepper to taste. Garnish with carrot curls.

EACH SERVING CONTAINS:
231 calories; 7 g protein; 6 g fat (0.7 g sat. fat, 0 g trans fat);
36 g carbohydrates; 4 g fibre;
405 mg sodium

Facts
Touted as the new wonder food, hemp hearts are high in protein and promote increased energy without adding sugar to the diet.

Pumpkin seeds have been noted for improving prostate health. They are high in zinc and a great source of magnesium. Pumpkin seeds contain phytosterols, a component necessary for reducing LDL cholesterol levels.

Dulse contains a large shopping list of vitamins and nutrients. Particularly known for its high B and B12 content, it can be added to many different dishes from soups to chowders, as well as rice dishes.

Irene McGuinness, of I.M. Marketing Ltd., oversees food articles for publication, recipe development, food styling, and cookbook editing, and is a frequent contributor to alive.