

Very Crunchy Salad feat. Fennel, Apples, and Pecans

Serves 8–10

The chopped pecans on this salad are toasted in oil with fennel seed and honey and are, incidentally, the best thing to ever happen to a leaf of lettuce. They're sticky and also crunchy, savory but also sweet. They are, in short, a miracle, and perhaps (though you don't want to hear this): the best thing on this whole menu. But since a bowl of just nuts and honey isn't quite right for this holiday, I'm combining them with bitter greens, sliced fennel, and a bit of apple. If you can't locate nice chicories, that's okay—use something like arugula, or skip the greens altogether and go for a very VERY crunchy salad with only fennel and apple (kind of Waldorf-esque, my original inspiration here).

Ingredients

2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more

1 cup raw/untoasted pecans or walnuts, coarsely chopped

1 tablespoon fennel seed

2 tablespoons honey

2 crisp, tart apples, such as honeycrisp or gold rush, thinly sliced

1 large or 2 medium fennel bulbs, very thinly sliced lengthwise, or 4 celery stalks, thinly sliced

2–3 cups bitter greens, such as radicchio, castelfranco, endive, or a peppery green like arugula

½ cup herbs, such as tarragon, dill, or chives

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar, apple cider vinegar, or fresh lemon juice, plus more

Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper

Instructions

- 1 Heat olive oil and pecans in a small skillet over medium heat. Toast, tossing occasionally, until the pecans are nicely toasted, about two minutes. Add the fennel seed and season with salt and pepper. Continue cooking, stirring often and keeping a close eye so nothing burns, until the nuts are golden brown and well-toasted, 4–5 minutes. Add honey and give it a stir— it'll bubble up and start to caramelize a bit around the edges, this is good. Make sure all the nuts are evenly coated, then remove from heat and set aside.
- 2 In a large bowl, combine the apples and fennel and toss with 2 tablespoons vinegar, seasoning with salt and pepper. On the serving platter or shallow bowl of your choosing, lay a base of bitter greens and top with herbs. Top with the fennel and apple, drizzling any of the fennel-y apple-y vinegar from the bottom of the bowl over everything and give it a little touse together to gently combine. Give a leaf a taste and season again with more vinegar, salt and pepper if needed. Top with the pecan mixture and more herbs if you like.

DO AHEAD: The pecans can be made a few days ahead, stored in the refrigerator. They're fine to use right from the fridge.

LEFTOVERS: I don't really subscribe to "leftover salad," but if you find yourself with leftover pecans, just store them in the fridge, and scatter them over roasted vegetables (carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, cauliflower) or another salad. Or do as I do and just scoop little spoonfuls into your mouth when you need a little something sweet and salty to get you through.