



Update your salad

Keeping it interesting is the key to making this dish more than just a side, says **Holly Brooke-Smith**

Often seen as a last-minute extra (or overlooked completely), a simple salad can add loads of flavour, texture, colour and nutrition to any meal. Here's our pick of exciting new leaves, plus ways to keep your salad healthy.

Little extras

Micro leaves are a fantastic way to add flavour and colour to your salads – they also look elegant mixed through larger leaves. Despite the slightly cheffy name, they're very simple ingredients – just early cuttings of household herbs and vegetables.

You can grow many of these yourself from seed packs. Just harvest before the shoots reach three weeks old. Alternatively, specialist websites such as finefoodspecialist.co.uk will deliver.



Four to try

Red basil

Spiced, peppery flavour and a lovely purple colour.



Celery leaf

Quite sharp and sweet with a distinct celery flavour already developed.



Broccoli shoots

Crisp and refreshing, this tastes closer to radishes than broccoli.



Parsley

Mild and fresh, it has the clean flavour of mature parsley, but looks much more delicate.



Exciting new leaves

Persian cress & luscious herby leaves, £1.40, Waitrose

Similar to rocket, Persian cress has masses of flavour, with pretty frilly leaves. Look out for other bags in the Steve's Leaves range, including fennel tops, wasabi rocket and pea shoots.



Red & green oak leaf living salad, £1, Asda

This pot of loose-leaf salad lasts for weeks. Colourful, crisp flavoursome leaves – simply snip off what you want. Great price, too.



Florette Duo Lambs Lettuce & Ruby Chard, £1.20, ocado.com

Good colour combo and, because it's quite hard to find ruby chard in the supermarket, it's an easy way to incorporate this leaf into your salad.



Keep dressings light

'The salad dressing you choose can make the difference between a healthy meal and one where the fat and calories match a burger,' says nutritional therapist Kerry Torrens. Here are her golden rules for healthy dressings:

Fat is good

It's the fat in oils that helps you to absorb valuable vitamins found in salad leaves. Look out for healthy oils on the ingredients list, such as rapeseed and olive, as well as good-quality nut and seed oils – try walnut, pumpkin and sesame.

Drizzle, don't drown Even if you choose the healthiest of dressings, using too much will increase calories. Measure out 1 tablespoon per serving and stick to it.

Avoid creamy dressings These are richer and have more calories and saturated fats. Go for lighter, oil-based dressings.

Watch the sugar Many low-fat products compensate by adding more sugar and salt. Check the labels for guidance and always read the ingredient list.



We like Sainsbury's Be Good To Yourself French dressing (£1/175ml).

It has moderate sugar and salt levels, and is low in fat and saturated fat. It uses olive oil, which is quite unusual in low-fat dressings, and only includes ingredients you would see in your cupboard.

TOP TIPS

- Don't leave garlic in your dressings as it will make the mix taste acrid after a day in the fridge.
- Add a splash of water to a classic vinaigrette to dilute the acidity of the vinegar.
- Xanthan gum will keep your dressing emulsified if you plan to keep it for a day or two.

Quick & easy vinaigrette

We have scores of unusual salad dressing ideas to try at bbcgoodfood.com, but the easiest ratio to use when making a vinaigrette is to mix 2 parts oil to 1 part acid (vinegar or lemon juice). Add a spoonful of mustard, a blob of honey and some seasoning for a no-fuss dressing to suit all salads.