

Identify and Prepare Dressings

DRESSINGS are often the focal part of salads. They can make food come alive with flavor. Dressings can also be used as dips, marinades, sandwich spreads, and dessert toppings. There are two primary classifications of dressings, vinaigrette and creamy, with endless varieties.



Objectives:



1. Classify salad dressings.
2. Describe common dressings and their preparations.

Key Terms:



balsamic vinegar
Caesar dressings
cider vinegar
creamy dressings
emulsions
emulsified vinaigrette dressings
French dressings

infused
Italian dressings
lecithin
light dressings
mayonnaise
opaque
ranch dressings
Roquefort dressings

Romanoff dressings
Russian dressings
temporary emulsions
Thousand Island dressings
Tzatziki dressings
vinaigrette dressings
vinegar

Two Types of Dressing: Vinaigrette and Creamy

Two primary classifications of salad dressings exist: vinaigrette and creamy types. Both have classic versions and endless variations.

VINAIGRETTE DRESSINGS

Vinaigrette (VIN-uh-GRET) **dressings** are light, fluid dressings made from oil, vinegar, salt, pepper, and other flavorings. You can make vinaigrettes with any combination of these

ingredients, though the classic standard is based on a ratio of three parts oil to one part white wine vinegar, with flavorings added as desired. Vinaigrette flavorings are traditionally herbs, spices, fruit juices, and grated hard cheeses. There are no rules about which flavorings may be incorporated. Vinaigrette dressings are best made just prior to serving.

Process

Making vinaigrette requires blending or mixing all the ingredients together by stirring, mixing with a spoon or whip, or shaking in a bottle—simple agitation. This mixture of oil and vinegar separates quickly and is typically mixed and applied to a salad immediately.

Emulsions

Emulsions are mixtures in which oil particles are held in suspension in liquid—usually surrounded by another liquid, often egg yolks. Emulsions are formed by the addition of an emulsifying agent (e.g., egg yolks) and vigorous agitation (beating).

Temporary Emulsions

Temporary emulsions are mixtures of oil and vinegar without an emulsifying agent—just agitation. All simple vinaigrettes are temporary emulsions. **Emulsified vinaigrette dressings** are thin, liquid dressings in which the oil and vinegar have been combined in such a way that they do not separate. This process is accomplished by the addition of an emulsifying agent (e.g., egg yolk) to the mixture. Egg yolks contain the chemical **lecithin** (a waxy phospholipid) that causes unmixable ingredients to combine for a time. In lieu of a yolk, the isolated chemical lecithin itself may be added. Either way, the mixture will be whipped or intensely mixed, effectively adding energy to the mixture to force the physical emulsion to take place.



FIGURE 1. Notice how easily oil and vinegar separate. Dark, sweet balsamic vinegar is beading up on rich greenish-yellow olive oil.

Oil

The oil chosen to make vinaigrette is the most important ingredient. Oil has a huge impact on the taste, and chefs usually purchase the finest oil they can afford. Some oils are virtually tasteless (e.g., canola, corn, and vegetable). Others (e.g., olive oil) have a stronger flavor, adding more depth to the dressing. Some oils have very strong flavors (e.g., walnut and sesame seed).

These oils can be pungent and are typically used in a lower ratio than the typical three-to-one in vinaigrette so they do not overpower the taste of the salad.

Vinegar

Vinegar is an acidic liquid that develops from a two-stage fermentation of almost any product that contains sugar and/or starch (e.g., fruits and grains). In the first stage of fermentation, yeast converts sugar to alcohol. In the second stage, bacteria convert the alcohol to acetic acid. The best vinegar is made from grapes and is as old as wine. Vinegar is from the French words *vin* (wine) and *agar* (soured). Vinegar adds tartness and acidity. Because vinegar can be made from so many sources, different flavors are available, including red wine, cider, raspberry, pomegranate, white, and balsamic. All of these are acidic and range in color from clear (white vinegar) to dark purple (balsamic), with many colors in between. The tastes and intensities vary.

Cider Vinegar

Cider vinegar is a mild, golden-colored liquid processed from fermented apples. Similarly, all other flavored vinegars—raspberry, tarragon, and pomegranate—are colored and flavored from the fruit, herb, etc. that is the source.

Both oils and vinegars can be **infused** (steeped or soaked in a liquid with herbs and/or spices) to add more flavor. To infuse flavors, the chosen oil or vinegar might be bottled with fresh basil, rosemary, garlic, and/or tarragon and left for days or weeks so the liquid can absorb the flavor.

Balsamic Vinegar

Balsamic vinegar is liquid with a rich color and a sweet, intense flavor. Balsamic vinegar comes from Italy and is derived from Trebbiano grape juice that is heated and then aged in wooden barrels, sometimes for years. White balsamic vinegar is slightly less intense than its purple cousin and comes from white grapes.

CREAMY DRESSINGS

Creamy dressings are dressings that are thick in texture and consistency and are usually complete emulsions. They are **opaque** (not allowing light to pass through) and are generally heavy and rich in flavor. The emulsion in creamy dressings is typically made from whole eggs (yolks and whites) or just yolks, with lots of neutrally flavored oil. Vinegar and



FIGURE 2. Here is a good example of oils and vinegars being infused with other flavors.

other flavorings are typically added to these creamy mixtures to create different flavors. While creamy dressings generally do not contain traditional cream, they often include a dairy product (e.g., yogurt, sour cream, or buttermilk).

Vinegar adds tang to creamy dressings, but the most intense flavors in creamy dressings usually come from added flavorings (e.g., chili powder, ketchup, buttermilk, mustard powder, and other herbs and spices). Creamy dressings may or may not include an emulsion. If they do, the emulsion was made of other ingredients, with the dairy product added later. Mayonnaise is an emulsion of oil, eggs, vinegar, and flavorings. Cooked (or boiled) dressings contain no fat or oil other than a small amount of butter. They are often tart and are used as binding agents as well as dressings for coleslaw and potato salad.



FIGURE 3. Creamy dressings, such as this Thousand Island dressing, are heavy, rich, and opaque.

Preparing Common Dressings

The ingredients and procedures for mixing vary based on the desired dressing. Being aware of the standard ingredients and procedures can help ensure proper mixing or blending.

SIMPLE VINAIGRETTES

Simple vinaigrettes can be made with any combination of oil, flavored vinegar, and flavorings (e.g., citrus tarragon vinaigrette, raspberry walnut vinaigrette, and mango pear mint vinaigrette). **Italian dressings** are classic vinaigrettes in their purest form, with three parts oil—either a bland oil such as soybean or a pungent oil such as olive—to one part vinegar (plain white to balsamic), Italian herbs and spices (e.g., oregano, basil, garlic, salt, and pepper), and grated hard cheeses (e.g., Parmesan and Romano). As with all simple vinaigrettes, Italian dressings require a good shake or mixing before use.



FIGURE 4. This simple Italian vinaigrette shows how fast vinaigrette dressings separate. Can you see the oil separating from the rest of the ingredients? Stirring, mixing, or shaking is needed before it is applied to a salad.

EMULSIFIED VINAIGRETTES

Emulsified vinaigrettes are exemplified by dressings that are not creamy in appearance and do not require mixing because all ingredients are evenly suspended. Some Italian dressings (e.g., Caesar) are made this way.

Caesar Dressings

Caesar dressings are spicy and flavorful emulsified vinaigrette dressings prepared from oil (usually olive oil), vinegar (usually white or red wine), eggs, smashed anchovies, salt, pepper, Parmesan cheese, and other spices. To make the emulsion, the chef must vigorously blend the eggs while slowly adding a stream of oil. Vinegar and other ingredients are added after the emulsion has formed and thickened.

French and Russian Dressings

French dressings and **Russian dressings** are examples of emulsified vinaigrettes that do not include eggs as emulsifying agents. These dressings are emulsified through energy by mixing their ingredients at high speeds, usually in a food processor or a blender. Both are based on blended mixtures of oil, vinegar, ketchup (or other tomato product), sugar, garlic, and other flavorings. Although similar in appearance, Russian dressing is spicier and often sweeter in taste and is a deeper red color than French dressing. (Note: In some preparations, lecithin or another emulsifier may be added to keep the mixture in suspension for a longer time period.)

CREAMY DRESSINGS

Creamy dressings are the richest and most stable dressings, and mayonnaise is the primary example. **Mayonnaise** is a semi-solid creamy emulsion of vegetable oil, eggs, vinegar and/or lemon juice, and flavorings. It is prepared by whipping the eggs and then beating into them a slow, steady stream of oil (to create the emulsion). Then it is necessary to blend with a small amount of lemon juice or vinegar and other flavors or spices, as desired. A basic mayonnaise dressing may be prepared by hand with a wire whisk or may be prepared in a blender, in a food processor, or with an immersion blender. The oil is generally a neutral flavor (e.g., canola).

Techniques

Several techniques are associated with the making of a mayonnaise dressing that does not separate and that stands up well under normal conditions. These factors and techniques are:

- ◆ Eggs, oil, and all dressing ingredients should be at room temperature for ease of emulsification.
- ◆ Egg yolks are more efficient emulsifying agents than whole eggs because yolks are able to hold more fat globules in suspension than a whole egg mixture. The spices and any other dry ingredients are beaten into the egg yolks or whole eggs before the addition of oil.

- ◆ Fresh eggs produce a more stable mayonnaise mixture than frozen eggs.
- ◆ Eggs and oil must be beaten rapidly at the beginning of the mayonnaise process to obtain the volume and lightness of a good, stable dressing.
- ◆ The amount of oil that is added to an emulsion is a key factor in its stability and volume. At the beginning of the emulsifying process, the oil is added slowly and in small quantities. Once the emulsion has some volume and form, the oil may be added in larger quantities and more quickly.
- ◆ Vinegar (or other acid) tends to thin the emulsion and bleach the color of the eggs or egg yolks. Acids are often added after the emulsion has some volume and form and alternately with the additions of oil.

Separation

Separation (or breaking of the emulsion) of a mayonnaise dressing occurs for several reasons:

- ◆ Adding the oil too quickly
- ◆ Adding too much oil at one time
- ◆ Poor or inefficient mixing methods
- ◆ Ingredients at the wrong temperature

Correcting a broken mayonnaise mixture requires one of two things:

- ◆ Placing a fresh egg yolk in a clean bowl and slowly beating in the separated mixture, as with the addition of oil to the original mixture
- ◆ Placing a small amount of commercial mayonnaise in a clean bowl and slowly beating in the separated mixture, as with the addition of oil to the original mixture

Mayonnaise, on its own, is considered a condiment or sandwich spread. It is also a common dressing for salads (e.g., tuna, egg, pasta, potato, and ham). In addition, it is the centerpiece ingredient for other dressings, including Thousand Island, ranch, Roquefort, Tzatziki, and Romanoff. **Thousand Island dressings** are creamy dressing mixtures prepared from mayonnaise, ketchup or chili sauce, pickles or pickle relish, onion, spices and herbs, and chopped hard-cooked eggs. **Ranch dressings** are creamy dressing mixtures prepared from mayonnaise and/or buttermilk, garlic, cilantro or parsley, chives, fresh lime juice, and spices. Some recipes call for sour cream to replace the mayonnaise. **Roquefort dressings** are creamy



FIGURE 5. Mayonnaise may be made by hand, but this small immersion blender uses energy, making a quick mayonnaise from blending eggs and a thin stream of oil.

dressing mixtures prepared from mayonnaise, Roquefort blue cheese (from France), garlic, sour cream, lemon juice or red wine vinegar, salt, pepper, and snipped parsley.

Not Emulsified

Some dressings categorized as creamy are not emulsified (and are not based on mayonnaise). These types include simple mixtures of ingredients along with a creamy substance (e.g., yogurt or sour cream).

Tzatziki Dressings

Tzatziki dressings are creamy Greek dressings prepared from yogurt and cucumbers, typically served with gyros and lamb dishes.

Raita Dressings

Raita dressings are Indian yogurt salad dressings similar to Tzatziki dressings that includes chopped mint, cumin, and jalapeño pepper.

Romanoff Dressings

Romanoff dressings are creamy dressing for fruit dishes (e.g., Strawberries Romanoff) prepared as a mixture of sour cream, brown sugar, cinnamon and/or nutmeg, and dark rum.

Light Dressings

Salad dressings tend to be high in fat and calories. **Light dressings** are reduced fat and calorie versions of common dressings, from Italian to mayonnaise to Thousand Island. The taste is typically different from the original versions, due to the change of ingredients that reduces the overall fat and calories. Simple, natural, fat-free ingredients are used to dress salads, including fresh lemon juice or vinegar with a sprinkling of herbs and spices. Commercially prepared light dressings generally remove part of the oil and replace it with water and thickening agents. The look remains very similar to the original, but the taste is notably different. Making a light dressing is as simple as decreasing the amount of oil in the vinaigrette or using light or non-fat prepared mayonnaise as the base for creamy dressings.

Summary:



Dressings are simple to make and add flavor and richness to salads. They can be used as sandwich spreads and marinades. There are two primary types: vinaigrettes and creamy dressings. Simple vinaigrettes are made with oil, vinegar, salt, pepper, and flavorings. The standard ratio for vinaigrette dressing is three parts oil to one part vinegar. Preparing vinaigrette dressing involves mixing, beating, or shaking the ingredients together. The mixture will quickly separate because it is a temporary emulsion.

The addition of egg yolks or a chemical emulsifier can bring the ingredients together in a permanent mixture called emulsified vinaigrette. Eggs whipped with a slow stream of oil result in a fully emulsified creamy mixture called mayonnaise

that is used as the base for other dressings. Some dressings are creamy in nature but contain no eggs and are made by blending oil with other ingredients.

Regardless of the dressing type, the type of oil and vinegar chosen are key to the resulting flavor. Creamy dressings tend to use bland oil (e.g., canola) and mild vinegar (e.g., cider). Vinaigrettes often use stronger oil and vinegar (e.g., olive oil and balsamic vinegar).

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What makes “light” dressing light?
2. Provide three examples of emulsified vinaigrettes.
3. List two dressings made from mayonnaise.
4. What type of oil would be a good choice for making mayonnaise?
5. List two creamy dressings based on dairy ingredients.

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Oil is the centerpiece of all dressings, and there are many from which to choose. The correct oil is crucial for making properly flavored dressings. However, oil is liquid fat, and fat generally thickens or hardens when chilled. Most dressings are kept refrigerated once they are opened, so how does vinaigrette stay in liquid form? Oil needs to be treated in a process called “winterizing.” A winterized oil will not cloud, thicken, or harden under refrigeration. Research how this process is accomplished. Are there oils that cannot be winterized? Does winterizing affect the flavor or nutritional value of oils? Do non-winterized oils return to their normal state when brought back to room temperature? Write a paper on your findings.

Web Links:



How Is Cooking Oil Made?

<http://www.answers.com/topic/cooking-oil>

Cheap, Healthy Salad Dressings: 102 Light Dressings

<http://cheaphealthygood.blogspot.com/2008/04/cheap-healthy-salad-dressing-102-light.html>

Salad Dressings

<http://www.recipetips.com/glossary-term/t—37511/salad-dressing.asp>

Choosing Specific Fats and Oils in Cooking

http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/cooking_basics/88159

Method for Winerizing (Dewaxing) of Vegetable Oils

<http://www.patentstorm.us/patents/4324735/description.html>