



A toss of fresh mozzarella cheese adds a bit of substance to this light, summery side dish.

Watermelon-Tomato Salad

They're neighbors in the garden—could they be friends on the plate?

BY KATIE LEAIRD

WATERMELONS AND TOMATOES are both vibrant in color, exploding with juiciness, and crazily flavorful in the height of summer. When we've experimented with watermelon-tomato salads in the past, we've highlighted the tomato, using the watermelon as a backup element. This time, I wanted the sweet watermelon out front, with tomatoes in the supporting role.

One bugaboo of mixing these two ingredients is the look of it: bright-red components are barely distinguishable from each other. What's more, both release an outsize amount of moisture. Yellow cherry tomatoes solved the color conundrum. As a bonus, the cherry tomatoes released far less liquid than larger varieties did.

But watermelon is so named for a reason: It's full of liquid. And with 4 cups of cut-up watermelon, I had a lot of excess liquid. Patting the watermelon dry with paper towels was insufficient. Weighing down planks of watermelon to press out liquid made a mealy mess.

As it turned out, the best way was the simplest: cutting it into cubes and draining it in a colander. Sprinkling the cubes with salt helped pull out even more moisture but turned the watermelon brackish; a bit of sugar worked just as well, with better flavor results.

To gently balance the melon's sweetness, I added the delicate flavor of a sliced shallot. Fresh basil lent

brightness, bits of fresh mozzarella added substance, and a simple vinaigrette brought everything together.

WATERMELON-TOMATO SALAD

Serves 4

This salad benefits from a liberal sprinkling of salt and pepper, so don't be shy when seasoning the mozzarella.

- 4 cups seedless watermelon, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 12 ounces yellow cherry tomatoes, halved
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- ½ teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice
- 1 shallot, sliced into thin rings
- ¼ cup fresh basil leaves, torn
- 6 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, torn into 1-inch pieces

1. Gently combine watermelon and sugar in large bowl. Transfer watermelon to colander and set colander in now-empty bowl. Cover colander with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

2. Toss tomatoes, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in small bowl; set aside.

3. Whisk oil, vinegar, lemon zest and juice, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Add shallot, basil, drained watermelon, and tomatoes and toss gently to combine. Transfer to platter and evenly scatter mozzarella over top. Drizzle with extra oil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.