

Horiatiki (Traditional Greek Village Salad)

The next stop on our world wine tour is Greece. So, let's say you stop in a Greek tavern for something to eat before going out wine tasting for the afternoon. The first thing you will have is horiatiki (ho-ree-ah-TI-ki), which is Greek for a "village" salad. Truth be told, as much as I want to stick to a Mediterranean diet, I'm not a fan of Mediterranean food, especially feta cheese. So, on a European wine and food pairing night at the ranch, I made this for Charlene, who adores feta and anything Mediterranean, and for my friend, who is a vegetarian. I



reluctantly scooped a plate for me just to be polite. I started eating it, and WOW! This thing just explodes in your mouth. No wonder Greeks serve it everywhere. As ridiculously simple as it is to make, it has everything you want in a food and wine pairing. Fresh, tangy, vegetal, acidic, and rich. A perfect match for a crisp, acidic white wine like **Jenner Family Estates Opal's Table Chenin blanc**, a Savignon blanc, or an Albarino.

Ingredients

- 1 small red onion
- 1 hothouse (English) cucumber
- 1 green bell pepper
- 2 cups tomatoes (about 2 large tomatoes)
- 1 cup whole pitted Kalamata olives
- 6 ounces feta cheese in a whole block
- 3 TBS Lodi Olive Oil
- 2 TBS red or white wine vinegar
- 2 tsp dried oregano

Preparing the Vegetables

Put about a cup of ice cold water in a small bowl (big enough to hold the onion slices). Cut the ends of the onion off. Cut the onion in half, lengthwise (with your knife end to end). Peel the skin off and lay the flat surface of the onion on the cutting board. Cut the onion in approximately 1/4 inch thick slices with your knife pointing *lengthwise* (from end to end). You want short, "half-moon" shaped pieces, not the long, stringy strips that you normally get when you slice an onion *across* its length. Put the onions in the ice water. Pour 1/4 cup of vinegar over the onion slices and mix. Let this sit for about 10 minutes. This will draw some of the juices out of the onion take the edge off its strong flavor.

Peel the skin off the cucumber in "stripes," leaving on as much skin as you peel off. To do this, run the peeler along the length of the cucumber, rotate the cucumber until the same width of skin is showing as what you just peeled off. Peel off another strip, then repeat. Slice the cucumber into 1/4-inch thick slices.

Cut the top and bottom off the bell pepper until you can see the inside. Run your knife along the inside of the bell pepper, cutting the core out. Discard the core and wipe away any seeds from the bell pepper. Carefully slice off as much of the remaining white ribs inside the bell pepper. Cut the pepper in half and slice each half into thin pieces, about 1/4 inch wide.

Let all the vegetables sit in the refrigerator *separately* for at least a half hour to get cold.

Mixing the Salad

Add the vegetables and olives to a 4-quart mixing bowl. Sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon of dried oregano. Drizzle the olive oil and sherry vinegar over the salad. Mix all the ingredients to coat the vegetables with the oil and vinegar. Spoon the mix into equal portions in shallow plates (not soup bowls). Put a block of feta cheese on top of each salad. Drizzle a little olive oil on top of the cheese blocks. Sprinkle the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of dried oregano over the cheese blocks. Serve with the bottles of olive oil and vinegar on the table so guests can add their own, if they want more.

Tips and Tricks

There are actually rules for making and serving a Greek village salad:

1. The essential components are tomatoes, red onions, and cucumber. The other vegetables are optional.
2. Do not put lettuce or any other leafy greens in the salad.
3. Do not mix the vegetables until just before you serve the salad.
4. The feta cheese must be a large block placed on top of the salad, not broken or crumbled.
5. The tomato and cucumber should be cut in fairly large pieces, not tiny cubes.
6. Add whole olives to the salad (not sliced).
7. Serve the salad with bread, not pita (so that you can sop up the juice).

I use Lodi Olive oil for everything. However, to make an *authentic* horiatiki, you should use Greek olive oil and Greek oregano, which you can buy on Amazon.com.

You know if you have an English hothouse cucumber, because they are about 14 inches long and usually come wrapped in plastic to protect the thin skin. If you must use a *regular* cucumber, peel **all** the skin off, slice it along its length into quarters, then scoop the core with the seeds out of each quarter. Cut the remaining strips into 1/2-inch pieces.

The ingredients listed make up the authentic horiatiki recipe. However, you can adjust the vegetable mix to your own preferences. Some people use green olives instead Kalamata olives, though the salad may be a bit more tangy. You can play around with how you cut the vegetables to suit your preferences. For example, you may like green bell pepper in chunks rather than in slices. You can also adjust the amount of olive oil and vinegar to get the perfect coating and flavor.