

Tzatziki for the Allium Averse

I was interviewed recently for Edible Vancouver & Wine magazine (did I mention my new cookbook, *The Side Gardener*, comes out this April??) and the lovely and observant writer of the piece asked why I rarely include garlic in my recipes... “Because it doesn’t like me”.

Believe me when I tell you, all kinds of nasty things happen when I eat garlic, and to a lesser degree, it’s onion relatives. Yes, the entire allium family (onions, shallots, leeks, chives, scallions and of course, garlic) is a wee bit of an issue for me and my stomach. I do pretty well with onions in small amounts if they are cooked, but raw garlic or onion? That is definitely a hard no for me. It hasn’t proven to be a hardship, I simply omit the garlic when a recipe calls for it and don’t even consider including it when writing my own. Having said that, if you are a fan of noxious bulb then by all means, add some. Just don’t invite me over. You’ll regret it, I promise.

While I have given you specific measurements, a recipe like this is very adjustable to suit your taste and needs and easily scales for a larger crowd. I’ve included the steps to make some easy pita crisps to serve alongside the tzatziki but it’s also delicious spread inside a roast lamb sandwich or spooned atop a piece of grilled chicken.

Makes: A nice bowl full

3/4 cup plain Greek yogurt

1/2 a medium English cucumber , grated and drained

1 tbsp lemon juice

1 tbsp lemon zest

1 handful mint leaves, finely chopped

1 handful dill fronds, finely chopped

1/2 tsp salt

1/2 tsp pepper

To finish:

1 handful roasted pistachios, roughly chopped

Sprinkle of sumac (optional)

Extra Sprinkle of chopped dill & mint

Drizzle of olive oil

Smidge more lemon zest

Flaky sea salt & pepper

Use a box grater or a food processor to grate the cucumber. Use your hands to gently squeeze the excess juice from the cucumber and place it in a bowl.

Add the yogurt, lemon juice and zest, chopped herbs and salt and pepper. Stir to combine.

Transfer the tzatziki to a small serving bowl and use the back of a spoon to create some loose swirls and crevices in the dip (this creates a much more attractive presentation and offers little wells for the toppings and olive oil to fill).

Top the tzatziki with the chopped pistachios, sumac, herbs, and lemon zest and then drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle with a little more flakey sea salt and another grind of pepper.

*The addition of sumac is optional so no worries if you don’t have any on hand. Sumac spice has a lemony flavour which may seem redundant given that the recipe also contains lemon juice and zest but my choice to use it is more about aesthetics than flavour as I love the deep red colour it offers in contrast to the other colours of the dish.

Easy Pita Crisps

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Split two store bought pita sheets in half and lay them on a cookie sheet. Brush the face up side of each shell half with olive oil and sprinkle with flaky sea salt (I really like to use this particular sea salt as it contains dried herbs de provence for added flavour...I use it all the time!). Bake in the oven for 8 to 10 minutes, until the pita shells are golden and crisp. Remove the tray from the oven and allow the pitas to cool before breaking them into random pieces with your hands.