

## **A melon makes a meal Seared in a salad, it's a summertime surprise.**

When it's too hot to cook an entire meal - or you don't have the urge - opt for something that takes just a little time to prepare and only a few seconds to heat.

Pan-seared watermelon with peppery arugula, anyone?

A summertime staple, watermelon is inexpensive and refreshing. It's also good for you because it contains lycopene, a winner in the antioxidant arena. Many studies have found that lycopene may help protect against certain diseases, including some cancers.

It is the red pigment - found in foods like tomatoes - that contains the lycopene. But unlike tomatoes, which have more lycopene when cooked or processed, watermelon needs no cooking to reap its benefits. Watermelon also contains high levels of beta-carotene.

Pan-searing the watermelon softens it slightly, making it pair nicely with soft greens and feta or goat cheese. The salad gets a nice crunch from the almonds and radishes. And the vinaigrette that's made with the blend of boiled-down balsamic vinegar and watermelon juice is sweet yet tangy.

Arugula (ah-ROO-guh-lah) is a green known for its bite. When used in salads, it's often mixed with other greens to balance the peppery flavor. Arugula leaves are very soft and highly perishable - they keep only a few days, tightly wrapped in plastic. Wash them well and pat dry before using.

You can find arugula sold in bunches at farmers markets and grocery stores. Some stores sell arugula in plastic containers with the lettuce or fresh herbs.

You can serve this salad as a main dish for an extremely light supper. For a more substantial meal, top it off with leftover grilled chicken. It's also ideal as a first course that will wow your guests.

You'll have extra watermelon juice. I highly recommend freezing it into ice cubes. The cubes are great addition to smoothies and summertime cocktails.

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# Watermelon, Arugula And Toasted Almond Salad



Yield: 6 servings

1 small seedless watermelon, about 6 pounds

Sea salt

1/2 cup olive oil, divided

1/4 cup white or dark balsamic or cider vinegar

Freshly ground black pepper

4 cups loosely packed arugula leaves or favorite salad greens

1/2 cup slivered blanched almonds, lightly toasted

1/4 cup green onion, thinly sliced

12 radishes, thinly sliced

1/3 cup crumbled feta or goat cheese

1. To prepare the watermelon, remove a slice from both ends. Stand the watermelon upright on a cutting board. Using a large knife, slice the rind from the flesh in one long slice if possible, working from the top to the bottom. Repeat, cutting away all the rind. Cut the flesh into 2-inch-thick slices. Set aside the rounded end cuts. Trim the slices into shapes that will fit on a serving platter. Reserve the center of the melon.
2. Season each slice with salt to taste. Using 1/4 cup of the olive oil, brush one side of each slice.
3. Heat a large skillet over medium heat. When hot, working in batches, place the watermelon slices, oiled side down, on the hot skillet. Leave for about 45 seconds or until heated. Transfer slices, heated side up, to a chilled plate.
4. Place the reserved center and the rounded end pieces in a sieve set over a bowl. Smash melon with your hands or a whisk, forcing the juice into the bowl. Measure 1 cup of the juices. (Drink the rest or freeze into ice cubes.)
5. In a saucepan, combine the vinegar and 1 cup watermelon juice. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, about 15 minutes, or until reduced to about 1/4 cup.
6. Pour the reduced juice into a serving bowl and whisk in the remaining 1/4 cup of oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add the arugula, almonds, green onion and radishes and toss well. Gently mound the arugula salad over the melon slices. Sprinkle the top with crumbled cheese and serve.

Per serving: 238 calories; 17g fat (64 percent calories from fat); 2g saturated fat; 8mg cholesterol; 6g protein; 18g carbohydrate; 2g fiber; 121mg sodium.

Adapted from "Homegrown Pure and Simple," by Michel Nischan (Chronicle Books, \$35)