

Roasted Beet, Onion, and Orange Salad

This dish embodies the contradictions of late winter in Northern California. The deep flavors of the roasted beets and onions contrast with the cool orange and fresh coriander. Add a cheese such as crottin (from goats) or pecorino (from sheep) since it's also the season of newborn kids and lambs.

Ingredients:

1 pound beets, preferably very small ones
20 large pearl onions, about 1/2 pound
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
Gray salt and freshly ground pepper
2 tablespoons hazelnuts
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1 tablespoon coarsely chopped fresh coriander (also known as cilantro)
1/4 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
2 oranges
1 ounce aged crottin or pecorino (optional), grated on medium-sized holes of box grater



Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Cut the stems and tails off the beets and trim both ends off the onions. Do not peel. In a baking dish, toss the beets and onions with the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast until tender, about 30 minutes for small beets, or about 1-1/2 hours for large beets, and 30 minutes for the onions.

Arrange the hazelnuts in a small baking dish and place in the oven with the vegetables. Cook, shaking the pan occasionally, until the nuts are lightly browned and fragrant, about 20 minutes. Fold the nuts into a tea towel and let sit about 5 minutes, then rub them vigorously with the towel to loosen and remove the skins. Chop the nuts coarsely and reserve.

As the vegetables are done, remove them to a plate, let cool, then peel. Depending on their size, cut the beets in half or into thin slices. Cut the onions in half lengthwise.

In a medium bowl, combine the hazelnut oil, coriander, and orange juice. Whisk until well combined and season with salt and pepper.

Peel and remove the membranes from the oranges with a sharp paring knife. Cut the oranges in half lengthwise, and then crosswise into thin slices. Seed the slices and add to the bowl containing the dressing. Add the onions and toss well. Divide the orange slices and onions among 4 plates. Scatter the beets around the oranges and onions and drizzle the salads with any juices left in the mixing bowl. Sprinkle some of the grated cheese over each salad, if desired, and sprinkle with the reserved nuts. Serve immediately. Serves four.

Tips:

I tend to overdress salads like these so you can soak up the dressing with a piece of crusty bread, and call it a meal.