

Fire up the grill!

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There are few things as enjoyable in life as sitting on a deck on a warm afternoon – after months of being cooped up indoors – eating grilled food with people that want nothing more than to spend time talking about everything from techniques they use to take fur balls off their cat to the evolution of New Zealand's foreign policy in the 20th century. Growing up, I spent nearly every summer weekend doing this and as an adult, I create as many chances as I can to do the same. Nothing beats outdoor eating with friends.

One of my favourite recipes provides an opportunity to enjoy good food with good friends in the great outdoors. About six years ago I came across a recipe for Grilled Cajun Chicken Salad that's a simple meal, but it's a winner that includes spicy chicken contrasted with a cool milky dressing on top of a bed of greens and assorted vegetables. Like hot and sour soup, or hot chocolate sauce on ice cream, the contrast is remarkable.

I rush for the moment there is a hint of warmth in the air and I can go to the store with the reasonable expectation that I can get spring potatoes and fresh green beans.

Grilled Cajun Chicken Salad with Spicy Ranch Dressing

Seasoning:

- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Salad Dressing:

- 1 ¾ cups buttermilk
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons chopped green onions
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ½ teaspoon grated lemon peel

Salad Ingredients:

- ½ pounds skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
- 1 package of mixed baby greens
- ½ cup of pecans, toasted
- ¼ cup raisins
- dozen red boiled (then cooled) spring potatoes (optional)
- 4 cups fresh blanched (then cooled) green beans cut into small pieces (optional)

Steps – Seasoning:

- Mix all ingredients in small bowl to blend.

Steps – Salad Dressing:

- Whisk ¾ cup buttermilk, mayonnaise, chopped green onion, chopped fresh parsley, apple cider vinegar, garlic, lemon peel and 1 ½ teaspoons seasoning mixture in medium bowl until well blended. Season dressing to taste with salt and pepper. (Can be prepared one day in advance. Store remaining seasoning at room temperature. Cover and refrigerate dressing).
- Rub remaining seasoning mixture onto chicken. Place chicken in medium bowl. Pour remaining 1 cup buttermilk over chicken, turning to coat. Refrigerate at least 30 minutes and up to 3 hours turning occasionally.
- Prepare barbecue (medium-high heat). Remove chicken breasts from buttermilk, shaking off excess. Grill chicken until just cooked through, about minutes per side. Transfer chicken to cutting board and let rest for 5 minutes.
- Combined mixed greens, beans, potatoes, pecans and raisins in large bowl. Toss with enough dressing to coat. Season salad with salt and pepper. Divide salad among 4 plates. Cut chicken on sharp diagonal into ½ inch thick slices. Arrange atop salads and serve.

