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Cucumber Salad with Sour Cream or Yogurt

MAKES: 4 servings

TIME: 30 minutes, largely unattended

Fast, Make-Ahead

If you use real garden cucumbers or the long, skinny "European" or "English" cucumbers, you can skip the salting (you may even be able to skip the seeding). But conventional cucumbers, with their thick skins and chewy seeds, really benefit from a brief salting, which draws out excess water and crisps them up.

1 to 1-1/2 pounds (about 3 medium) cucumbers

1/2 cup sour cream or yogurt

2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice or white wine vinegar

Pinch cayenne or 1 teaspoon good paprika

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup chopped fresh dill or parsley, or more to taste, plus a few sprigs for garnish

1. If you're using really good cucumbers, just slice them and proceed to Step 3
2. If you're using conventional supermarket cucumbers, peel them. Cut them in half lengthwise, then scoop out the seeds with a spoon. Slice, salt, and put in a colander; let drain (over a bowl or in the sink) for 10 to 20 minutes. Rinse, drain, and spin or pat dry. (If you want super-crunchy cucumbers, wring dry in a towel.)
3. Combine the sour cream [or yogurt] and lemon juice, then whisk in the cayenne. When the cucumbers are ready, toss them with the dressing. Season with salt and pepper, garnish with the dill, and serve or refrigerate for up to an hour.

Cucumber Salad with Tomatoes and Peppers. A mini chopped salad: Add 1/2 cup chopped tomato (seeded and salted to drain excess liquid) and 1/2 cup chopped red or yellow bell pepper to the cucumbers.