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Tomato & Pickled Green Bean Salad with Whipped Feta

Serves 4 to 6

In Michigan, Nick's mother grows the best tomatoes in the world. In the mid and late summer, they are the center of every meal. The combination of tomatoes, cucumbers, and green onions is classic. For this recipe, we add brined green beans and a whipped feta-like cheese. It reminds us of Greek salad.

WHIPPED FETA:

12 oz/240 g cheese in the style of feta, crumbled
1/2 cup/120 ml sour cream
1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
1 tbsp fermented honey, or honey
1 tbsp sweet onion powder
1 tsp kosher salt
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper

1 qt/ 750 g cherry tomatoes, halved
4 Persian or Japanese cucumbers, halved lengthwise and cut into thin half-moons
1/4 cup/ 50 g brined green beans (see below)
2 bunches green onions, cut into 1/4-in/6-mm rounds
3 garlic cloves, minced
1/4 cup/60 ml unfiltered sunflower oil
3 tbsp red wine vinegar
1-1/2 tsp minced fresh marjoram
1-1/2 tsp kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
2 tbsp marjoram oil, or extra-virgin olive oil
Finishing salt
Fresh marjoram, chervil, or flat-leaf parsley for garnish

TO MAKE THE WHIPPED FETA: In a food processor, combine the feta, sour cream, lemon juice, honey, onion powder, salt, and pepper and puree until the texture resembles softened cream cheese. The whipped feta can be made in advance and stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

In a large bowl, combine the tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans, green onions, garlic, sunflower oil, vinegar, marjoram, and salt. Season with pepper and stir gently to coat evenly. Let marinate until the vegetables begin to give off some of their juice, about 30 minutes.

Continued on Page 2



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Page 2, continued

Transfer the marinated vegetables to a large serving platter. With a large spoon, place a scoop of the whipped feta in the middle of the salad. Garnish the entire salad with the marjoram oil, finishing salt, and pepper. Leftover salad can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

Brined Green Beans

Makes 6 cups/ 1.2 kg

This pickle came about in an attempt to re-create a pickle we had at a favorite local Chinese restaurant. We immersed the beans in a salt brine with no additional ingredients to mask the flavor and the results were incredible. They have a green, Castelvetro olive flavor that is great in salads (see Tomato and Pickled Green Bean Salad with Whipped Feta, or served with chile oil and *shichimi togarashi* as a condiment to eat with steamed rice.)

3 tbsp kosher salt

3 cups/720 ml water

1 lb/ 455 g green beans, trimmed and sliced into rings 1/8 in/3 mm thick

In a nonreactive container, dissolve the salt in the water to make a brine. Add the green beans and top with a weight to keep them submerged in the brine. Seal the container, using a lid with an airtight seal, open the container every few days or so to release carbon dioxide buildup, and check for mold. Place in a clean, well-protected, low light area with an ambient temperature of 60° to 68°F/16° to 20°C until the beans taste sour, about 3 weeks.

Transfer the beans and brine to one or more nonreactive airtight containers and refrigerate for up to 1 year.