



## Syrian Fattoush Salad

*As a fattoush maker for over 15 years, I know this salad like the back of my hand so I have some very helpful tips:*

- *Use only the hearts of the romaine--don't be tempted to use the tough outer leaves. Also, tear off the top of the heart if it seems limp and leathery.*
- *Traditionally, Italian parsley is used in place of cilantro, but I like the flavor balance of the mint and the cilantro. The size of a bunch of cilantro or mint in the summer months is double the size than in the winter. So, if you have big bunches in the summer, use 1/4 of a bunch, instead of 1/2 of a bunch.*
- *Splurge on French sheep's feta or a good quality imported feta cheese. It's rich with a nice salt and acidity balance. Don't skimp!*
- *Use fresh lemon juice, cumin seed and real Kalamata olives. Remember that the taste of the lemon juice varies through the year so use your buds and adjust accordingly. Adding a pinch of sumac to boost up the flavors of the lemons is one trick.*
- *Use fresh cumin seed, and not the pre-ground powder. There is a big difference in flavor when you toast the seeds to coax out their oils.*
- *And finally, don't buy canned, pitted olives. Take the extra time to pit real Kalamatas yourself. I promise that you'll be happy with the results!*

### **Salad:**

3/4 cup vine-ripened cherry tomatoes, halved

3/4 cup English cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced in 1/4 inch cubes

1/4 cup thinly sliced red onions (about 1/2 of a small red onion)

1/4 cup finely chopped cilantro (about 1/2 a bunch)

1/4 cup finely chopped mint (about 1/2 a bunch)

6 cups hearts of romaine lettuce (about 3 hearts), torn roughly by hand

2 pieces of pita bread

2/3 cup sheep's milk feta cheese

1/4 cup pitted Kalamata olives (about 12 olives)



### **Lemon vinaigrette:**

1 teaspoon finely chopped garlic (about 1-2 cloves)  
1/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice  
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar  
3/4 teaspoon toasted and freshly ground cumin (see below)  
2 ounces olive oil  
5 ounces extra virgin olive oil  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Serves 6 as a side dish

To make the **pita chips**, preheat oven to 350°. Trim edges off of the pita, keeping a circle shape, so that the pita can be split into two halves. Cut each half into 6 triangles and arrange on a baking sheet. Toast for approximately 12 minutes, or until the pita chips crisp up and are golden brown. Turn baking sheet halfway through baking. Set aside and cool. Break the chips into large pieces.

To make the vinaigrette, in a small saucepan over medium-heat, toast cumin until aromatic and light brown, approximately 3 minutes. Toss occasionally to prevent burning. Let cool and set aside. Grind in a spice grinder until cumin becomes almost like powder. In a medium bowl, whisk together the garlic, lemon juice, rice wine vinegar, cumin, extra virgin olive oil and olive oil. Season to taste with generous amount of salt and black pepper. Set aside.

To serve, toss romaine hearts, cherry tomatoes, feta cheese, mint, cilantro, red onions and olives with the vinaigrette in a large bowl, making sure that the leaves are well coated with the vinaigrette. Divide the salad among 6 chilled salad plates. Serve immediately.

### **Sidebar:**

Sheep are the most important dairy animal in the Mediterranean. In much of the Middle East, the sheep's milk cheese of choice is feta. Look for imported sheep's milk feta cheese which has been barrel aged. To feta aficionados, there is no comparison between artisanal-barrel aged feta and the feta produced in huge automated factories. However, given the expense and in some areas the unavailability of barrel-aged feta, feta cheese imported from Greece, France and Bulgaria are your next best bet.