

Strawberry Spinach Pasta Salad with Fresh Lemon Vinaigrette

A Bountiful Kitchen

3 chicken breast halves, cooked and chopped about 3-4 cups total
3/4 pound pasta, cooked according to package directions any shape
bottled poppy seed dressing, optional (such as Brianna's brand)
1 quart fresh strawberries, washed, sliced and drained*
green onions, chopped, optional
8-12 cups fresh spinach or a mixture of spinach and greens, washed and dried
1 cup dried cherries or Craisins
1 cup salted cashews

Fresh Lemon Vinaigrette:

1 cup canola oil
1/2 cup white balsamic or cider vinegar
1 fresh lemon, juiced, about 1/3 cup
1 1/2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1 clove garlic, minced
1/3 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt

The night before or early in the day before serving:

Cook the chicken breasts, trim off any fat, chop and set aside. I like the chicken to be in 1/2 inch chunks.

Cook the pasta and drain. Let cool. If desired, pour about 1 cup poppy seed dressing over pasta and store in fridge until ready to assemble salad.

Prepare the strawberries and layer in a pan, such as a 9x13 cake pan, to prevent the berries from bleeding onto each other or the salad. This method will insure the berries are completely dry before assembling the salad.

Chop green onions, set aside.

Make the dressing:

Whisk all dressing ingredients together in a blender or in a bowl using an immersion blender or whisk. Set in fridge until ready to use. When ready to assemble, whisk again, just before pouring.

To assemble salad:

Place spinach in bowl or platter, or assemble on individual plates. Layer the following on top of greens:

Pasta (you may toss with additional poppy seed dressing if the pasta has soaked up most of the dressing), chicken, strawberries, green onions and dressing. Top with cashews and dried cherries.

Tips:

- *Making sure the strawberries are washed, sliced and drained is essential. If the strawberries are not drained, they will bleed onto the chicken and pasta, giving off the appearance of red chicken or pasta with red or pink spots. Trust me :o
- I made this recipe up without any cheese, but it would be yummy with a little blue, Gorgonzola or goat cheese sprinkled on top.
- If you would like the dressing to be thicker, add about 1/4 cup of mayo (light or regular) to the recipe.
- You may also substitute honey for the sugar in the dressing recipe.