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# Slice, Dice, Salsa

## Easy recipes that will spice up your spring!

JEFF SELDEN



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Growing up, we ate Mexican food as much as we ate hamburgers or pizza. Though we never ate at Taco Bell, somehow the name resonated with me and I named my dogs Taco & Bella; they are a pair of feisty, energetic, and loving Havanese puppies.

My childhood idea of yummy Mexican food was tacos with ground beef, shredded cheese, lettuce, and a red spicy sauce called salsa that really made tacos taste great. Because my mother was a caterer with a Latin heritage, she often mixed things up with unique salsas; not the typical smooth red salsa that everyone had with chips.

Salsa literally means "sauce" in Spanish. Some refer to salsa as a style of Latin music with a vibrant rhythmic beat. Lively, hot, get-up-and-dance beat! So what does music have to do with salsa? Spoon some salsa on a boring piece of chicken or fish, and taste the happy mouthwatering "WOW!" that it creates! That's music to your mouth, but not just any kind of music: fiery, sultry and festive music. Salsa livens up food and perks up your plate.

Since my mother has been wowing taste buds for the past 35 years, salsas have always played an important role in my cooking. I use salsa to replace the typical, classic sauces that seem so obvious and boring, and I liven up my food with the kick of uniqueness that salsa provides. Traditional, hot, mild and exotic salsas are easy and fun to make. Once you master the simple techniques, you can make salsas out of almost anything. However, just as with music, certain harmonies should be respected.

In preparing salsas, note that there is very little fat, which makes for fresh, bold, bright and colorful flavor. The following recipes can be used to top fish, roast pork, chicken, beef or simply served solo with tortilla chips, cucumber or carrot discs (if you want to be healthy). They can also be a replacement to fat-filled dressings to pep up a deliciously crisp salad. These are recipes that are fun and delicious.

### Salsa Fresca

Also called Salsa Cruda, it's the most familiar salsa. This simple fresh recipe is yummy on everything from chips to tacos to burgers and steak.

- 3 Serrano or jalapeno chiles minced with seeds
- 2 large ripe tomatoes finely chopped
- ½ cup of finely chopped white onion
- 3 scallions diced
- 2 tablespoons of coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
- Salt to taste
- Juice of one lime

Chop together the tomatoes and chiles with the seeds using a food processor or knife. Chop in onions, scallions, and cilantro until a coarsely textured salsa is formed. Add oil, lime and salt to taste and enjoy. The longer this sits, the better the flavors meld.

Alternative options to enhance and embellish this recipe would be to add some finely chopped red onion, 2 cloves of freshly chopped garlic, ½ of a finely diced yellow pepper, ½ of a finely diced cucumber for color and crunch, and my favorite secret ingredient: 2 teaspoons of ground cumin which adds a very unique flavor that most love. Pan-roasting the tomatoes makes even less-than-stellar, off-season tomatoes taste rich and deeper in flavor. Don't be afraid of the black skins on the tomatoes. They are the key to the salsa's flavor. This salsa will keep perfectly in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks, but its flavor is best if you let it settle to room temperature.

### Fruit Salsa with Fresh Mango

My favorite fruit salsa is made with ripe mangos that represent the taste of summer or the tropics. As with many fruits, it is hard to improve on their natural perfection. Anytime you want an unmistakable tropical flavor to food, try this recipe on grilled pork, shrimp or chicken.

- 2 serrano or jalapeno chiles minced with seeds
- 1 large ripe mango, peeled, seeded and diced
- 1 small red onion finely chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic, roasted until brown and soft, and chopped
- 2 tablespoons of fresh chopped cilantro
- ½ finely diced red pepper, seeded
- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- Juice of 1 lime

In a bowl mix together all of the ingredients. This salsa will keep well in the refrigerator for only a few days. Delicious cold or at room temperature. Mix with diced raw Ahi tuna, lump crabmeat or chilled lobster to create a mouth-watering appetizer.

Modern salsas can break the rules of tradition. I can certainly admit to some mishaps with testing some unique recipes. Wasabi, banana and cheese; these are just a few that didn't work. Respecting tradition with ingredients will more likely result in my favorite flavors that we have joined together for some more unique salsas. The addition of grilled pineapple, black beans, tamarind, pomegranate, and roasted corn can make for a tasty accompaniment to classic salsas. The fun of creating is that you can simply add ingredients, and unlike baking, you don't need exact measures of anything. The salsas simply get better and more interesting as you create!

I hope you enjoy these recipes as much as I do. You just can't help having fun. They will bring music to your mouth. *Deliciosa!*

Eat, Drink, Party!

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With an extensive background in luxury event planning, honed at some of the country's most exclusive hotels, Jeffrey Selden leverages his two decades-long party history in his role as Managing Partner of his family owned business, Marcia Selden Catering and Event Planning. Whether it's an opulent party for 500, or an intimate private dinner, he holds an industrywide reputation as a power event-builder with a unique, creative vision and flawless results. Marcia Selden Catering and Event Planning has been named "Best of the Gold Coast" of Fairfield County by Moffly Media for several years running, and was recently honored by The Knot as "The Best of Weddings."

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