

Asparagus Salad with Shaved Watermelon Radishes, Castelvetrano Olives, and Perrydale

Beauty isn't the only thing this salad brings to the table—it is a mosaic of complementary textures and fresh spring flavors. I found magenta-centered watermelon radishes at Food Front coop in Northwest Portland, but if you can't track them down substitute another radish variety. Castelvetranos are big, buttery, bright green olives that are found at most specialty markets. Golden balsamic vinegar adds sweet acidity without the dark color of regular balsamic, allowing the vibrant colors of this dish to shine.

Makes 8 Servings

3 bunches asparagus
1 pint Castelvetrano olives
Good-quality extra-virgin olive oil
Golden balsamic vinegar
Kosher salt
Freshly cracked black pepper
4 medium watermelon radishes (see note)
1/3 pound wedge Perrydale or other semi-firm cheese

Have ready a large bowl of ice water. Working in batches, steam asparagus for 3 minutes in a steamer basket or bamboo steamer. Immediately transfer the asparagus to the ice water bath. When cool, transfer the asparagus to a paper towel-lined platter and blot dry. Use a sharp paring knife to slice each asparagus spear in half lengthwise or in thirds for those with thicker stalks. Cover and refrigerate until needed.

Pit the olives by crushing them with the side of a chef's knife or other hard flat object. Work the pits out with your fingers and discard. Place the olives back into the olive juice (to keep their bright green color) and refrigerate until needed. (The asparagus and olives can be prepared up to 4 hours ahead.)

To assemble the salad, toss the asparagus in oil just to coat. Drizzle with vinegar, salt and pepper to taste and toss again. Divide the asparagus between 8 plates. Using a mandoline set on the thinnest setting, shave the radishes into thin rounds. Toss the radish slices in oil to coat, and then vinegar, salt and pepper to taste. Spread the radish slices across the center of the plated asparagus. Strain the olives from the juice and scatter them around the plates. Use a vegetable peeler to shave thin slices of the cheese on top and around the salad. Garnish with fresh, coarsely-cracked black pepper.

—Created by Andrea Slonecker