

Seasonal Eating
Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Pasta Salads Make Good Summer Sides
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Summer is the time for cookouts and picnics. My Grandmother loved picnics. She'd pack up some sandwiches or we'd take hotdogs or hamburgers to cook on the grill and go to the park on Lake Michigan for the afternoon or evening of swimming and eating. My Dad remembers going to the lake as a child after his father would get home from work. Cookouts and picnics make an inexpensive outing with lots of fun and good food (everything tastes better outside anyway!).

So as we ramp up the outdoor dining season, I'm always looking for different side dishes to serve with meats on the grill. Cool salads of all kinds, whether lettuce or pasta or vegetables, are a perennial favorite. They're refreshing, full of fresh produce from the garden or farmers' market and there's an endless variety.



Pasta salads are always a good option that are refreshing yet filling. There's always the traditional macaroni salad with a creamy mayonnaise dressing that hits the spot along side a hamburger. For a picnic or a ladies luncheon, I'll make a bow tie pasta salad with chicken and cashews drenched in a creamy honey mustard dressing and served with a Cheddar biscuit and fresh fruit. And then there are the Italian style pasta salads with an oil and vinegar dressing and chunks of salami or ham, roasted peppers and fresh mozzarella balls.

Pasta is such a mild, base that you can flavor it anyway you desire. Pasta salads can be southwestern flavor with chili powder and corn, peppers and Cheddar cheese or a takeoff on a BLT sandwich with tomatoes and bacon or Italian with pesto and tomatoes and marinated artichokes. The variety is endless and you don't necessarily need a recipe. Throw in whatever you have or whatever your family likes. You can use bottled dressings like honey mustard, oil and vinegar, balsamic vinaigrette or ranch or make your own from scratch.

For convenience there are even boxed mixes for pasta salads that come in many flavors. You can use them as they direct by usually just adding mayonnaise to the seasonings and cooking the pasta or you can add some fresh ingredients like grapes or tomatoes or chicken for a heartier salad.

Green beans will be here before we know it and the pasta salad below is a delightful combination of mini penne pasta and blanched green beans. Green onions add flavor, celery and water chestnuts add some crunch and red bell peppers add color. Green beans are always good with almonds and bacon and then a honey mustard vinaigrette coats everything in a sweet and tangy dressing. Perfect for a hot dog cookout or with a grilled pork tenderloin or in a picnic basket with sandwiches.

The Extension Explores Food Preservation session on Zoom this month focuses on preserving green beans. If you would like to attend the June 18 session at 10:00 a.m. go to <https://tiny.utk.edu/ExtensionExplores21> or look on the Bedford County Extension website at Bedford.tennessee.edu under family programs to register for free.

Honey Mustard Pasta Salad with Green Beans

1/2 pound green beans, ends trimmed and snapped into 1" pieces
1/2 pound mini penne pasta
1/4 red bell pepper, sliced into matchsticks
2 ribs celery, thinly sliced
2 green onions, sliced
1/2 (8-ounce) can sliced water chestnut, drained and cut into slivers
5 slices thick cut bacon, cooked, drained and crumbled
1/4 cup toasted, slivered almonds

Dressing:

2 tablespoons whole grain mustard
2 tablespoons honey
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1/8 teaspoon black pepper

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the green beans and cook for 3 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon or spider into a bowl of cold water to cool. Bring the water back to a boil and add the pasta. Cook for 12 minutes or until just tender. Drain and pour into a large bowl. Add the drained green beans, red bell pepper, celery, green onions and water chestnuts. Stir in the dressing to coat. Refrigerate until needed. Just before serving add bacon and almonds.

For the Dressing: In a medium bowl, whisk together the mustard, honey and rice vinegar. Drizzle in the oil while whisking. Season with salt and pepper.