



The Great American *Back-Off*

WITH DEFERENCE TO THE BRITISH TV SERIES

JANUARY: We're supposed to start anew with New Year's Resolutions. Mine usually involves a diet of some form or another. They're destined to fail. I find that abstinence does NOT make my heart grow fonder.

I was watching an episode of the British baking series and noticed how happy the contestants and judges were while talking about and eating the cakes and other outlandish confections. It was a far cry from the way I looked when I was on that diet that insisted you eat and fast at designated times.

I was at a program that featured dinner and a movie. The host announced he was changing the order; we would watch the movie first, then eat afterwards. I panicked. That would mean I was eating during fasting time. I thought about leaving early. Crazy, right? That diet ended immediately.

The previous year I failed the abstinence diet. I meet with a group of friends once a year for a feast

of oysters. We take turns choosing the accompanying beverage. We've had lager, Champagne, sherry, both white and rosé wine. We laugh. We talk. We toast. It was my turn. I didn't think coffee or even ice water was going to be met with much enthusiasm. I joined them with bubbles. Funny: the world did not stop turning on its axis. The gods of the underworld did not whisk me away. I realized having a little caused far less anxiety than having nothing at all. The secret of success, at least for me, was to back off of taking seconds.

My in-box is loaded with advice of all kinds. The best of everything from so called experts, or the latest "influencer." Recently, the best foods for health and happiness landed on my screen. Avocados appeared at the top. Well, I like avocados. I toast a nice thick piece of bread, mash half the ripe avocado on top, then drizzle it with lovely olive oil and a sprinkling of flaky sea salt. Sometimes I repeat with the other half of avocado, because it's

going to turn brown if I wait another day. Somehow, I don't think this is how the avocado is topping the health list. Back off that second portion!


Well, now I had another half of this beautiful, healthy avocado that wouldn't stay pale green for long. I looked through my recipes and came up with this salad that checks so many boxes. It's crunchy, refreshing, filling, and a breeze to put together. No need to back off or especially, abstain. How nice is that? 



PHOTO: GIRMANTAS URBONAS

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Cucumber and Avocado Salad



INGREDIENTS:

Dressing:

- ½ cup olive oil
- 1/8 cup white wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 small shallot, minced
- 1 teaspoon honey

Salad:

- 2 ripe avocados (1 use 2 plus my extra half)
- 2 medium cucumbers, peeled and seeded (or 1 long seedless cucumber, unpeeled)
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Crumbled goat cheese or dollops of fresh ricotta, if desired

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Whisk the dressing ingredients together. The salad dressing may be made 2-3 days in advance and stored covered in the refrigerator. Remove 15 minutes in advance of serving and whisk or shake to combine. (You might have more dressing than you will need for the salad. Store the remainder in the refrigerator.)
2. Make the salad: Halve the avocados and discard the pits. Using a small knife, cut the avocado flesh into ½ inch cubes. Use a large spoon to scoop the cubes into a large bowl and toss with a little dressing. Add the cucumbers and scallions and just enough dressing to coat the vegetables lightly. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Top with crumbled goat cheese or dollops of ricotta, if desired. Serves 4.



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