

# Salade Niçoise

This classic French salad may not be exactly what you think it is. BY JAMIE SCHLER

THIRTY YEARS AGO, AFTER ARRIVING IN FRANCE AT THE HEIGHT OF SUMMER, ONE OF THE FIRST MEMORABLE DISHES I HAD WAS A SALADE NIÇOISE. The composed main-course salad was beautiful: a carefully plated mix of fresh vegetables, briny black olives, juicy tomatoes, silken canned tuna, and hard-cooked eggs.

Brimming with a wild variety of flavors and contrasting textures, this new-to-me salad—named after the city of Nice on the French Riviera—was both satisfying and refreshing. These days, I'm still in France, married to a Frenchman and busy running our hotel in Chinon. And on a hot summer day, I still crave a salade Niçoise (nee-SWAHZ).

Traditionally, there's little cooking involved in preparing the salad: The fish comes from a can or jar, and ideally, the eggs are cooked earlier in the cooler part of the day. Steamed green beans and boiled potatoes have made their way into American and Parisian bistro versions, but what you'll find in Nice is usually a salad of crisp, just-picked garden vegetables, most likely *favettes*, the tender tiny fava beans popular in the Mediterranean region, or thin, raw slices of the gorgeous purple artichoke known as *Violet de Provence*. Indeed, as long as you include the basic elements, which most agree are tomatoes, olives, eggs, and anchovies or tuna (or both), and you don't toss it (a big no-no), there really is no single right way to make this salad. Just be sure to serve it with a chilled glass of wine and a crusty loaf of bread, *bien sûr*.

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## salade niçoise

*There's really no room for inferior ingredients to hide in this salad, so use the best produce and canned tuna you can find; I especially like ventresca-style tuna (see p. 89), which tastes rich and flakes beautifully.*

Serves 6

### FOR THE VINAIGRETTE

- ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- 1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

### FOR THE SALAD

- 2½ lb. tomatoes (8 to 10 medium), cored and sliced into wedges
- Kosher salt
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and halved (optional)
- 1½ cups fresh or thawed frozen fava beans, skinned if necessary
- 1½ lb. artichokes (about 6 small), trimmed, choke removed, and sliced very thinly lengthwise
- 1 medium red bell pepper, trimmed, quartered lengthwise, and very thinly sliced crosswise
- 4 scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 6 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and quartered lengthwise
- 1 cup Niçoise olives (or other black olives)
- 6 oil-packed anchovy fillets
- 10 to 12 oz. jarred or canned high-quality oil-packed tuna, drained
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 8 to 10 fresh basil leaves

### MAKE THE VINAIGRETTE


In a small bowl, whisk the vinegar and mustard. Continue whisking as you add the olive oil in a slow, steady stream to emulsify. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Set aside.

### MAKE THE SALAD

Place the tomato wedges in a large colander and sprinkle with ½ tsp. salt. Let drain for 20 minutes.

Rub a serving platter or six plates with the garlic to subtly perfume the dish, if you like; discard the clove.

Arrange the tomatoes and other vegetables, eggs, and olives on the platter or plates. Drape the anchovies over the top. Flake the tuna into bite-size pieces, and arrange on the salad. Drizzle the vinaigrette over the salad, and season to taste with salt and pepper. Rip or snip the basil leaves into pieces, scatter over the salad, and serve.

 **Pair With:** PROVENÇAL ROSÉ  
This quintessential Provençal salad has a lot going on. Rather than match the flavors, match the attitude with a light, dry rosé, the quintessential Provençal wine.

## Tailor your salad

This recipe for salade Niçoise sticks close to the style served in and around Nice, but you can change it up to suit your taste. Here are some suggestions for doing just that.

**Vary the vegetables.** In place of favas, try blanched, cooled green beans. Boiled, cooled, and sliced new potatoes are a popular addition in bistros in Paris, while lettuce, celery, or cucumbers would add refreshing crunch.

**Pick your preferred olive.** Niçoise olives, small olives with an intensely savory flavor, are—perhaps obviously—the classic choice. They're not easy to pit, so they're almost always sold and served unpitted. Feel free to swap them for other brine-cured olives, such as Kalamatas, if you prefer.

**Simplify the dressing.** I like a mustardy vinaigrette paired with the salad, but it's also common to simply drizzle it with some extra-virgin olive oil and maybe a squeeze of fresh lemon juice.

**Omit the whole anchovies.** I love anchovies, and they're even more traditional than tuna. But they're polarizing, and lots of people are squeamish when faced with a fillet. You can skip serving them whole, but keep the deep savory flavor they provide by mashing a fillet or two to a paste and whisking it into the vinaigrette.

**Use fresh tuna instead of canned.** Though many would argue that the bold flavor of canned tuna is integral to a Niçoise salad, there's no law saying you can't use slices of grilled or seared fresh tuna instead.

## Pan bagnat: Niçoise salad to go

*Pan bagnat*, Niçoise dialect for the French *pain baigné*, or “bread bathed,” is basically a sandwich version of the Niçoise salad, so called because the dressing soaks into the bread. Traditionally, it was a carry-along meal for fishermen and field hands, but it's become classic picnic fare in France. To make one to serve a few people, slice a round, crusty boule almost but not quite through the center, leaving the two halves attached on one side to help keep the filling tucked in. Pull out some of the

soft interior crumb to make room for the filling. Rub the inside halves of the boule with the garlic clove, then layer on the components of your salade Niçoise (be sure to use pitted olives!) and drizzle with vinaigrette. Always prepare pan bagnat a few hours in advance of eating to allow the ingredients to marinate, the bread to moisten, and the flavors to blend. Even better, pack it at the bottom of your picnic basket so the weight on top compresses it a bit, commingling the flavors.

