

Excerpted from *The Brain Health Kitchen* by Annie Fenn (Artisan Books). Copyright © 2023.

Smashed Cucumber, Tomato, and Olive Salad

Serves 4

Chopped salad gets an upgrade thanks to a clever technique that improves the flavor and texture of cucumbers. You'll use the flat side of a chef's knife to crack the skin, which releases the seeds and creates naturally jagged pieces. The crags in the cucumber help the simple dressing—extra-virgin olive oil, vinegar, and salt—get absorbed rather than slide off into a puddle on the bottom of the bowl.

The deep green Castelvetrano olive is the best choice for this salad. It's meaty, buttery, and large enough to easily tear into pieces with your hands, which adds even more irregular edges to catch the dressing. This variety has a milder flavor than many olives—they're called "dolce" in Italy (translation: sweet)—which makes them a good entry-level choice for the new olive lover. Any large, fruity, and buttery olive works well here, too, such as Cerignola, Frescatrano, or Manzanilla.

1 pound (455 g) English or Persian cucumbers (see Tip)

½ teaspoon kosher salt

1 cup (155 g) Castelvetrano olives, pitted

Half of a 4-inch (10 cm) ball fresh mozzarella (4 ounces/115 g)

1 cup (170 g) cherry tomatoes, halved

⅓ cup (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

Fresh basil leaves, larger ones torn

Flaky salt (optional)

Freshly ground black pepper

Cut the cucumbers in half lengthwise and place them cut side down on a cutting board. Gently smash the cucumbers using the flat side of a large knife until they start to break apart. Roughly chop them into 1- to 2-inch (2.5 to 5 cm) pieces and transfer along with any juices to a large bowl. Sprinkle with the kosher salt. Set aside while you prepare the remaining ingredients, for at least 5 minutes and up to 1 hour.

Tear the olives into two or three pieces each and tear the mozzarella into 1-inch (2.5 cm) pieces. Add to the cucumbers along with the tomatoes, oil, vinegar, and basil. Toss well and finish with flaky salt (if using) and pepper.

Tip: The thin-skinned English cucumber works best for this dish.