



Watercress salad with pear and dried cherries

Serves 4-6 *Recipe from "A Greekalicious Feast" ebook*

Watercress grows wild in Greece and has been popular since ancient times. It is said to have health-boosting properties and the Greek general Xenophon made his soldiers eat watercress as a tonic to keep healthy.

In ancient Greece watercress was boiled in goats' milk to cure throat and chest infections, earaches and toothaches. When Hippocrates founded the first hospital on the island of Cos around 400 BC, he grew wild watercress in the natural springs. He used it to treat blood disorders as he believed in its healing power.

Watercress has many health benefits and prevents disease by boosting your immunity.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 bunch watercress, most of the stem cut off and discarded and leaves washed well
- 100 g Greek feta, crumbled
- 3 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted
- 1 corella pear, thinly shaved
- 2 tablespoons dried cherries

DRESSING

- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
 - 4 tablespoons lemon juice
 - sea salt, to taste
- Place all the ingredients for the salad in a bowl.
- Place the dressing ingredients into a small bowl and whisk until combined.
- Drizzle the dressing over the salad and gently toss. Serve.



HEALING COOKING AND SPIRITUAL EATING THE GREEK WAY – the agapi way By Maria Benardis

THE PAST HAS MUCH to teach us about the value of our food and the spiritual rituals surrounding its consumption. Very few cultures have such a long and thoughtful food history as that of Greece. The meze table, for instance, is a familiar social ritual to anyone who has lived or travelled around Europe, but it was the philosophers and doctors of ancient Greece who first gave it a special meaning – they understood and showed us how valuable it is to human health and social happiness.

The notion that what we eat can also heal us was also developed in ancient Greece. It was the father of Western medicine, Hippocrates, who paved the way and awakened the ancient Greeks and the rest of the world that what we eat can either keep us healthy or cause illness and disease. His famous and profound words, 'Let medicine be thy food and food thy medicine', still resonate today. Many of us have lost touch or forgotten the nutritional benefits and healing qualities of food and opt to solely rely on conventional medication for healing. Instead, we should be looking at supplementing these conventional methods with holistic approaches, such as eating the right foods for our particular ailment, and using methods such as naturopathy, massage, music and colour therapy, as they did in ancient times.

The ancient Greeks also introduced the world to the concept of energy (from the Greek word *energia*) and its effect on humans, animals, plants and health. We are all connected spiritually by energy. The ancient Greeks would preach that 'we are

all one' and this belief continues today. We all form a part of the circle of life with no beginning and no end, particularly when it comes to cooking and eating and respecting our food and where it comes from. The ancient Greeks knew that if the food they were cooking had good energy and brought *agapi* (unconditional love), their dishes would be masterpieces – and masterpieces they were.

We are all at one with the universe and have the potential to allow its energy into our lives. This energy can only be achieved if we are free of ego and come from a place of *agapi*. Only then can we come from a truthful place of love and be spiritually guided in our life – and, when it comes to cooking, our ego needs to be in balance so we can see the healing power of food and appreciate its benefits.

When cooking with an unbalanced ego we become self-absorbed and disconnected from the world – we are not at one with the energy source of the universe.

A way to attain a place of *agapi* is to adopt an *eco* (not an *ego*) approach to cooking. *Ego* can make us believe that what we are cooking is solely for ourselves. An *eco* approach takes into consideration the environment and other people. It reminds us that we are not alone and that our choices have consequences, not only for ourselves, but for the environment and other people. *Eco* is a 'we' approach; *ego* is a 'me' approach. However, as the philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras said, 'Everything comes round again – so nothing is completely new'. An *eco* approach involves using food that is local, organic

and in season to ensure you are at one with nature and are following the natural flow of the energy cycle of the universe.

The ancient Greeks lived closer to nature than what we do today and recognised that people have an energy similar to that of the plants and other animals, and that all of Earth's organisms interact on a spiritual level. By learning how the ancient Greeks related to food, themselves and nature, we can go back to basics and understand how to interact with the earth and its energy with respect.

In ancient times, the gods and nature were respected and acknowledged by being assigned a name. This continues today, except now there is one God. *Agapi* also features in traditions around songs and stories to celebrate an occasion or a dish. There are many songs and dances performed during preparation and cooking time, dishes are kissed and dishes are blessed. Ingredients are not merely something we consume to sustain us; they are something deeper and more spiritual. A mealtime is not a time for one to eat alone – the experience must be shared around a lavishly set table to feast and excite all the senses. Hospitality and the notion of the spirit of *kerasma* – the offering of food to those we love – are still alive today. Above all, the eating and cooking should be a conscious exercise in kindness. When we cook from a joyous state of mind and with love we eat better, feel better and, in turn, live better. Unfortunately, many people have become unaware of how they shop, cook, eat and live. We have desensitised ourselves from nature and from the rest of the world.

However, we can change this by becoming present in the here and now – becoming aware of how we live and then choosing to alter or improve this.

We live in times where the quality of an ingredient is measured by its fancy labels and a manufacturer's or advertiser's budget. The quality of ingredients is wrongly judged on its appearance, rather than on its actual nutritional value. We trust the brands more than we trust ourselves and what our body needs, for the most part. Quality and goodness are determined by how well the ingredient, from the time it was planted in the ground to the time it is placed in our pantries, has been treated and what has been added or subtracted to it during this time. It is determined by what I call the 'impact imprint' – how our actions impact on our energy, the energy of others and the environment. The imprint can be both positive and negative; so we need to be mindful of how we emit our own energy and how we treat food and the environment. Any negative 'impact imprint' can be minimised or eliminated by understanding the true healing energy of food and treating ingredients with respect. We unintentionally ask for mediocre food that is not healing to our body and soul.

We have much to learn from the ancient Greeks, and the first golden rule is to always cook, choose our ingredients and eat from a place of *agapi*.

The above article is based on Maria's forthcoming book, "Healing Cooking, Spiritual Eating in the Greek Tradition – How the Wisdom of Ancient Greece Can Lead to a Longer Life".