

THE BEST RUSSIAN SALAD

ENSALADILLA RUSA, ESTRELLA DE
PLATA

I'm not sure how the Russian potato salad (called Olivier in its native country) became a world staple, showing up as a part of a Korean appetizer spread, finding its way into the Turkish meze assortment, and becoming one of the most beloved tapas of Spain. But being Russian, I can testify that in Spain *ensaladilla rusa* is even more popular than it is in its homeland. Spain's tastiest *ensaladilla*, hands down, is served at Estrella de Plata, a stylish tapas bar in Barceloneta, Barcelona's old fishermen's quarter. Even my mother—who claims that her Russian salad is the world's greatest—was sufficiently smitten to ask the chef, Dídac López, for the recipe. In addition to the cooked potatoes, carrots, and peas found in the Russian version, this features tuna and roasted red peppers, plus a wonderfully piquant touch of green olives and anchovies in the mayonnaise dressing. All the ingredients are partially mashed, so the texture is halfway between a salad and a spread (at Estrella de Plata it's served with thin bread rusks). Bring the salad on a picnic, serve it as part of a tapas buffet, or just enjoy it as a light lunch with cold meat or cold cuts.



FOR THE SALAD:

- 3 medium-size Yukon Gold potatoes, cut in half
- 1 large carrot, cut in half crosswise
- 1 small turnip, cut in half
- About 3 ounces green beans, trimmed
- 1 cup cooked green peas
- 6 ounces imported solid oil-packed tuna, or
1 can (6 ounces) Bumble Bee tonno in olive oil,
drained and flaked with a fork
- 2 roasted red bell peppers (see page 385;
from a jar is fine too), diced
- 3 hard-cooked eggs; 2 finely chopped, 1 grated

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 20 pimiento-stuffed green olives
- 6 to 7 best-quality oil-packed anchovy fillets,
drained and chopped
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise (preferably Hellmann's),
or more to taste
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- Coarse salt (kosher or sea) and freshly ground
black pepper

1. Make the salad: Place the potatoes, carrot, and turnip in a medium-size saucepan. Add water to cover by 2 inches, bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, partially covered, until all the vegetables feel tender when pierced with a skewer, about 15 minutes for the carrot and turnip, and a little longer for the potatoes. As the vegetables become soft, use a slotted spoon to transfer them to a bowl. Take care not to overcook. Bring the water back to a boil, add the green beans, and cook until tender, about 5 minutes (they should be neither al dente nor overcooked). Drain the beans, blot them dry with paper towels, and set aside. Let the vegetables cool to room temperature.

2. Peel the potatoes, carrot, and turnip, then cut them into small dice and transfer to a mixing bowl.

Cut the green beans into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch lengths and add them to the bowl with the diced vegetables. Then add the peas, tuna, roasted peppers, and the 2 chopped eggs. Using a sturdy fork, mash the salad until it has a chunky-creamy consistency.

3. Make the dressing: Place the olives, anchovies, 2 tablespoons of the mayonnaise, and 3 tablespoons water in a blender and process until a medium-fine paste forms. Stir the olive mixture into the salad. Place the remaining mayonnaise and the lemon

juice in a small bowl and whisk to mix, then stir into the salad. Season with salt and black pepper to taste. If you'd like the salad to be moister, add a little more mayonnaise. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the salad stand for about 2 hours. (You can make the salad up to 1 day ahead. Refrigerate it and let it come to room temperature before serving.) To serve, spoon the salad on a shallow serving dish and garnish it with the grated egg. **SERVES 8 TO 10 AS A TAPA, 4 TO 6 AS A SIDE DISH**

ROASTING PEPPERS

Roasted peppers are essential to Spanish cuisine. They can be prepared in either the oven or the broiler with equally good results, but you must start with peppers that are fresh and very red or beautifully green.

Red or green bell peppers as needed, cored,
cut in half, and seeded

Olive oil, for brushing the peppers

TO ROAST PEPPERS IN THE OVEN: Preheat the oven to 425°F. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil and lightly brush it with olive oil. Push down gently on the peppers to flatten them and place them on the baking sheet skin side up. Brush the peppers with a little olive oil and roast until they are tender and lightly charred, about 35 minutes. Transfer the peppers to a large bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let stand for 15 minutes. Peel the peppers and use as directed in the individual recipes.

TO ROAST PEPPERS IN A BROILER: Prepare the peppers as directed above, then arrange them skin side up on a well-oiled broiling tray and broil about 3 inches from the heat until tender and lightly charred, 15 to 20 minutes. Let stand and peel as directed above.