

Autumn Salad with Grilled Figs, Roasted Butternut Squash and Walnuts

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This salad is an autumn harvest festival in your mouth! Several varieties of young kale, roasted walnuts and cubes of butternut squash, caramelized red onions, grilled Mission figs, smoky tempeh, and espresso balsamic vinegar all come together in this delicious salad that can either be served as an appetizer or main course.

I'm growing Lacinato, Siberian and Redbor kale so I used all three in this salad. I harvested young leaves, 6-8" long, but you could also use baby kale, mature kale or your favorite salad mix. I especially enjoy the use of kale here because it is at its prime when the seasons change and the nights get cold. Kale will actually become a bit sweeter after the first couple of frosts. And we *still* haven't had a frost up here! The lake, because of its large size, provides us a beneficial microclimate which helps extend the growing season for more tender crops.

This salad is full of vitamins, minerals, fiber, healthy fats and protein too!

Here's how to pull it together:

Total Time: 55-60 min. Prep Time: 20 min. Baking/Grilling Time: 35-40 minutes

For four dinner-size servings, you will need:

8 cups packed, chopped kale (about two large bunches), destemmed - (see note below)

1 red onion

1 medium butternut squash

8 fresh figs (I used purple Mission figs)

8 strips of smokey tempeh (I use Lightlife. If you need gluten-free, check package labels carefully, some use regular soy sauce in the seasonings which contains a small amount of gluten)

1/2 cup walnut halves & pieces, plain, roasted

2 tsp olive oil (optional)
1 tsp rubbed sage
1/2 tsp cracked black pepper
1 tsp salt, divided
1/3 cup of your favorite vinaigrette (here is the link to my [Dijon mustard vinaigrette](#) or you might like to try one of these oil-free dressings from the [Plant Based Dietitian](#))
2 Tbsp Espresso Balsamic Vinegar (optional) ~ you can find this [here](#).

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Peel and cube butternut squash into 1/2" cubes. Toss with 1 tsp of the olive oil (if using), sage, salt and pepper. Place in a single layer on a baking sheet. If not using oil, line baking sheet with parchment paper. Bake until tender, 35-40 minutes. Remove from oven, keep warm.

2. While the butternut squash is baking, peel and slice the red onion into 1/4" slabs, keeping the rings in tact as much as possible. Heat a grill pan (I use cast iron) or gas grill to med/high. Grill each onion slab 4-5 minutes on each side until soft and nicely charred. Alternatively, you can separate the rings and caramelize the onions in a med/high skillet until browned.

3. Wash the figs and cut in half. In the same grill pan over med/high heat, place each fig cut side down. Grill 1-2 minutes until grill marks are visible. Using a metal spatula, carefully remove each fig onto a separate plate or cutting board. If some of the seeds or flesh stick to the grill, scrape them off and spread them back on the fig/s. Allow to cool, then slice each fig in half again. Set aside.

4. Remove 8 strips of smoky tempeh from the package and separate. In the same grill pan or a large skillet, cook the strips over med/high heat until browned on both sides, about 6-8 minutes. Remove from skillet and allow to cool. Cut each piece into diagonal strips ~1/8" wide. Set aside.

5. Using the same hot skillet, or another dry skillet (no oil), toast the walnuts over med/low heat until fragrant. Toss frequently to prevent burning, 3-4 minutes. Remove from skillet, set aside to cool. Alternatively, walnuts can be spread in an 8" square pan and roasted along with the butternut squash for ~10 min. Keep an eye on them so they don't get too dark.

6. Wash and spin-dry kale (see note below). Roughly chop into bite-sized pieces and place into a mixing bowl large enough to allow for some tossing. Unless using baby kale (or other tender greens) massage the kale with the other tsp of oil and 1/4 tsp salt for several minutes. This will begin breaking down some of the tough fibers, making them softer. Next, drizzle the kale (or other greens) with your chosen dressing and toss well to coat.

7. Arrange the leaves on individual plates or a serving platter. (I like to serve this on walnut cutting boards.) Top each salad with equal amounts of butternut squash, onions, smoky tempeh, grilled figs and toasted walnuts. Drizzle each salad with 1-2 Tbsps Espresso Balsamic Vinegar or unflavored aged balsamic. Enjoy!

This Espresso Balsamic Vinegar is truly delightful and will take just about any dish over the top. I've been having fun testing that theory. You can find it well-utilized in the following dishes:

~ [Grilled-Peach-Volcano-Rice-Pilaf](#)

~ [Mediterranean-Burgundy-Rice-Pudding-with-Fresh-Figs](#)

As I mentioned, kale becomes a bit sweeter after a frost or two. If you previously haven't been a fan, try eating it in the fall if it's been grown in an area that gets frost. You could also grow some yourself (it grows well in a pot on a sunny porch!) or look for it at your local farmer's market.

Kale also needs to be destemmed to remove the tough stalks. This is a quick and easy process that will make a big difference in the enjoyment of any dish using kale. If you're unsure how to do this, watch the quick video from Vanille Verte below. Most pre-chopped cellophane bags of kale found in the produce section of your grocery store do a poor job of this and the kale is often dried out. Kale should be well hydrated when used. This is easily done by cutting an inch or so of the stalks off the bottom and placing the bundle/s in a container of ice water for about 30 minutes (up to overnight).

Kale should also be as dry as possible before massaging. Be sure to spin it well in a salad spinner or blot with absorbent towels.

TIME-SAVING TIPS:

Nutrition Facts	
Servings: 4	
Amount per serving	
Calories	668
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 32.2g	41%
Saturated Fat 3.9g	20%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 1023mg	44%
Total Carbohydrate 75.6g	27%
Dietary Fiber 17.4g	62%
Total Sugars 26.2g	
Protein 25.8g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 446mg	34%
Iron 7mg	41%
Potassium 898mg	19%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a food serving contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Recipe analyzed by [verywell](#)

~ the cubes of roasted butternut squash and the caramelized onions can be prepped ahead of time. These are both great items to include on your weekly prep day to have on hand for this dish as well as a number of other dishes.

~ kale can be washed, dried, destemmed and chopped in advance. Keep it in a gallon-sized re-usable zip-lock plastic bag along with a paper towel until needed (be sure to squeeze all the air out of the bag).

~ Walnuts (or any other type of nut) can be toasted ahead of time. I keep mine stored in glass nut butter jars until needed.

OPTIONAL ADD-INS:

- ~ Grilled or raw cubes of crisp apples
- ~ Grilled or raw slices of Asian or Bosc pear
- ~ Cannellini beans
- ~ Roasted root strips or cubes: carrots, parsnip, beets (these can be roasted alongside the butternut squash and onions)

When you make this, let me know how it turned out. Be sure to take a photo and tag me #chefcatherinebrown.

DISCLOSURES: None. his post was not created in affiliation with any product or brand. The opinions expressed are my own. I will only write about products I trust and use.