

GREEK ORZO SALAD WITH CHICKPEAS

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Greek Orzo Pasta Salad with Chickpeas is a very versatile and welcome entrée or side dish. The chickpeas provide a “complete protein” and serve as a veggie, as well. Paired with the other health-boosting veggies, savory feta, and nicely balanced red wine vinaigrette, and you’ve got a real crowd pleaser.

I recommend using whole wheat orzo, if available, for the added nutrient value. Regular orzo, gluten-free or another small-shaped pasta can certainly be used instead.

Photo: Love + Craft Kitchen

Whenever possible, choose a good quality **red wine vinegar** either from an oil and vinegar shop or the grocery store. A few grocery store brands that earn high marks include:

- Laurent du Clos Red Wine Vinegar
- Pompeian Gourmet Red Wine Vinegar
- Martin Pouret Vinaigre D’Orléans Vin Rouge
- Holland House Red Wine Vinegar
- Lucini Pinot Noir Italian Wine Vinegar

To Cook the Orzo:

Pasta in salads is best if it is tender yet firm. Cook 1 cup dry orzo pasta for about 7 minutes (until al dente), drain, and rinse under cold water. Toss with 1 – 1 1/2 tablespoons of the vinaigrette recipe below to season and prevent sticking together. 1 cup dry = approximately 2 1/2 – 3 cups cooked orzo.

Make-Ahead:

This salad can be prepared ahead up to the point of tossing with the vinaigrette (through step 3). Add the vinaigrette just before serving or up to 30 minutes ahead (step 4). Garnish just before serving.

Makes: 6 – 7 cups of salad; about 1 cup of vinaigrette

INGREDIENTS

Vinaigrette

1/2 cup olive oil

1/3 cup red wine vinegar

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 small clove of garlic, minced (or ¼ teaspoon dried garlic powder)

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1/4 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon ground black or white pepper

Salad

2 1/2 – 3 cups cooked orzo pasta (prepared from 1 cup dry)

1 1/2 cups cooked chickpeas (cooked from dry, frozen and thawed, or 1 – 15 ounce can, drained and rinsed)

1 cup chopped artichoke hearts, moisture pressed out (choose frozen + thawed, or canned in water, not marinated)
1 cup cucumber, diced and seeded (or use seedless variety)
3/4 cup diced tomatoes
1/4 cup finely diced red onion
1/4 cup halved Kalamata olives
1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese (plus more if desired)
Fresh basil leaves, chiffonade for garnish

DIRECTIONS

1. Place all of the vinaigrette ingredients into a jar or small mixing bowl. Shake the jar or whisk the ingredients together in the bowl until combined and fully emulsified.
2. Cook the orzo pasta according to package directions for salad use (al dente; about 7 minutes). Drain the orzo and place it into a large mixing bowl. Drizzle 1 tablespoon of the vinaigrette over top and toss to coat. Set aside and allow the orzo to cool completely before adding the other salad ingredients.
3. While the orzo is cooling, prep the chickpeas, artichoke hearts, cucumber, tomato, onion, and olives (not the cheese or basil). Add all of these ingredients to the large bowl with the cooled orzo and gently toss to combine.
4. Pour about half of the vinaigrette over the salad ingredients and toss gently to coat. Add half of the feta cheese and more of the vinaigrette to thoroughly coat the salad. Depending on the pasta, all of the vinaigrette may be used or a small amount may be leftover.
5. When ready to serve, garnish the salad with the remaining feta cheese and the basil chiffonade (thin-cut strips or ribbons). Serve.