

# Keep Cool With Herby Adjika Cucumber Salad

Sweet crunchy cukes + silky peppery adjika = salad heaven.

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Food-related news in Russia caused a chuckle this week thanks to [the story of Ksenia Ovchinnikova](#), a devout Orthodox Christian who is suing McDonald's in Omsk because, she alleges, their advertisements for mouthwatering hamburgers caused her to break the rigid Lenten Fast. Ovchinnikova is asking for compensation for moral damages and the affront to her religious feelings from the Golden Arches. However, her modest demands — just 1,000 rubles — suggest to me that Ovchinnikova hasn't done nearly enough research into just how potentially lucrative legal cases against the fast-food behemoth have been in the past.

I'm especially sympathetic to Ovchinnikova at the moment because I also succumbed this week to the overwhelming temptation of a double quarter pounder with cheese. This is by no means a regular occurrence with me — my fridge is usually far too full of experiments that

need eating up to blow my meager calorie budget on a fast-food binge, but every now and then I do give in. This week the combination of a frustrating morning on the phone with recalcitrant service providers and a long afternoon stuck in a hot traffic jam pushed me over the edge, and my car seemed to turn into the “Avto-Mac” of its own accord.

Of course, I’m paying for it now and struggling to get back on to my regular kinda sorta mindful eating plan.

In theory, summer should be an easy time to stick to healthy eating: fresh fruit and vegetables abound, healthy grilled meat is in constant rotation, and extremely hot weather always dulls my appetite. But the grill can be a double-edged sword thanks to hard-to-resist sides, ice-cream is ubiquitous, and balmy evenings encourage one to sit outside and snack and sip while enjoying the occasional cool breeze.

Each summer, to stave off the inevitable slippage, I work hard to expand my range of healthy salads, making the most of fresh cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, carrots, and all the marvelous fresh herbs growing in the garden. But my most recent transgression at McDonald’s may well be connected to a current and very acute boredom with cucumbers, brought on by the large bushel of Persian cukes that a well-meaning friend recently gifted us. These diminutive cucumbers are sweet and crunchy, but they don’t pickle particularly well, so it was a challenge to enjoy them before they went bad. Having made several batches of okroshka, sliced lots of the cucumbers into pitchers of water, tossed them with radishes and sour cream to go alongside shashlik, stirred my PIMMS with spears of them, and forced my family to live on an enormous amount of tuna salad, I was in danger of running out of ideas.

Until, that is, I remembered Thai cucumber salad, which so successfully combines the watery crunch of cucumbers with a remarkable fusion of sweet, sour, and spicy flavors. In no mood to do an extra grocery store run, I grabbed a jar of invaluable adjika, Georgia’s spicy, and flavorful pepper sauce that I always keep on hand, and blitzed it up with some olive oil to drizzle on top of cool, crunchy cucumber slices, fresh from a quick pickle in a bit of sugar, salt, white vinegar, and Mirin.

A bunch of herbs from the garden completed this delightful salad, which is turning out to be the universal accompaniment to many summer dishes. I’ve already served it with grilled flank steak and poached salmon, tossed the cucumbers and their spicy drizzle with soba noodles, and spooned them into a lackluster cup of healthy grains. I used up the last of the bushel for a big batch of the salad, which I took artfully arranged on a white platter to a summer potluck where it disappeared almost immediately. Once I get more cucumbers (a phrase I never thought I’d type) I will serve these next week with a cold yogurt soup and cured fish.

And the best thing about this spicy, crunchy, delicious herby salad? It has practically no calories, making it sinfully good, with absolutely no scope for legal action.

### *Ingredients*

- 2 1/2 lbs (1200 grams) Persian cucumbers, peeled and sliced into 1-centimeter-thick slices.
- 4 Tbsp kosher salt, divided into two halves
- 1/3 cup (80 ml) white vinegar

- 1/4 cup (60 ml) Mirin (Japanese cooking wine)
- 2 Tbsp white sugar
- 1 tsp dill pollen or dill seed, toasted and ground
- 2 Tbsp adjika
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- Juice of half a lime
- Garnish with 3/4 cup (180 ml) fresh herbs such as mint, chives, dill, lovage, and summer savory

### *Instructions*

- Toss the sliced cucumbers with 2 Tbsp of the kosher salt and set them in a colander and let them drain for one hour.
- Whisk together the remaining salt, sugar, white vinegar, and Mirin.
- Rinse the cucumbers, then toss them with the vinegar mixture in a non-reactive bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.
- When you are ready to serve, whisk together the adjika, lime juice, and olive oil.
- Drain the cucumbers and pat them dry. Arrange the cucumbers on a serving platter and garnish with the fresh herbs. Drizzle the adjika mixture over the cucumbers and spritz the salad with lime juice. Serve immediately.

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