

taste of tradition slaw

Old King Coleslaw is indeed a merry old soul, making appearances at picnics and parties and on plates throughout the year. It is especially welcome when Southern weather turns warm.

BY VIRGINIA WILLIS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH DUNLAP AND JOHN O'HAGAN
FOOD STYLING BY LOREN WOOD / PHOTO STYLING BY MALINDA KAY NICHOLS



MY GRANDMOTHER, WHOM I CALLED MEME, ALWAYS HAD A large green Tupperware container filled to the brim with creamy old-fashioned slaw at our family gatherings. It was as big as a drum and scuffed from many years of use. The opaque lid, bent and twisted, always needed a bit of extra effort to achieve that patented airtight seal. As big as it was, its contents would last just the weekend. She served cole slaw with fried chicken, pulled pork, and vegetable-only suppers that included sliced tomatoes from the garden, long-cooked green beans in a salty broth, and sweet corn on the cob.

In later years, we bought her a food processor, but it sat on the shelf as she continued using her old-fashioned hand-crank apparatus for grating. Made of stainless steel, it attached to the linoleum counter, perched on three legs with suction cups. It was always great fun as a child to get to turn the handle. My sister and I felt so grown up helping out in the kitchen, and we would take turns processing the vegetables. Although different bladed cones could be attached to vary the texture, Meme used the blade that grated the cabbage very finely. Her slaw was a simple combination of green cabbage, carrots, and mayonnaise, seasoned with a little sugar, salt, and pepper.

There are three kinds of old-style Southern slaws: barbecue slaw, yellow slaw, and coleslaw. Barbecue slaw is a traditional western North Carolina dish made with chopped cabbage, pungent vinegar, and red pepper flakes. Yellow, or mustard, slaw is more common in South Carolina and eastern North Carolina, and its main ingredients are cabbage and mustard. Coleslaw is what most people in the Southeast consider slaw, a salad composed primarily of cabbage, carrots, and mayonnaise. Meme, of course, always used Duke's Mayonnaise—still our family's mayonnaise of choice. I have a firm belief that the South should also be referred to as the Mayonnaise Belt. Only a Southerner would slather that much mayonnaise on a vegetable and still refer to it as a salad. There is a small subset of coleslaw that is made with oil and vinegar but that, of course, in true Southern form, often contains sugar.

Then there are the variations. I am still not convinced that canned pineapple belongs in slaw, regardless of what the ladies down at the church say—raisins, too, for that matter. I'll allow that chopped Granny Smith apples can add a layer of flavor with tartness and aren't too far off the beaten path. Many recipes also call for shredded broccoli stems.

Chefs have their own tweaks and twists, as well. Chef Linton Hopkins of Restaurant Eugene in Atlanta has featured pan-seared coleslaw cakes on his menu, while Chef Chris Hastings of Hot & Hot Fish Club in Birmingham has married jumbo lump blue crab salad with a fennel-mirliton slaw on his. Straying not too far from traditional, but certainly elevating the bar, Sara Foster of Foster's Market in Chapel Hill has a recipe in her cookbook, *Sara Foster's Casual Cooking* (Clarkson Potter, 2007), for spicy cole slaw that adds arugula and basil to shredded cabbage. My recipe for Celeriac Slaw is essentially a French slaw of celery root with mayonnaise, herbs, and lemon. I must admit that I've certainly branched out if I consider celeriac to be a component of anything called slaw, and I'm not too sure what Meme would think of that.

The key to all slaws, though, is to properly dress them. Too much, and it's more akin to cabbage soup, overwhelming the combination of vegetables; too little, and it's a bit like grazing. Just the right amount of dressing can transform a simple head of humble cabbage into a satisfying side, perfect for Old King Coleslaw to make an appearance at your warm-weather feasts.



“I have a firm belief that the South should also be referred to as *the Mayonnaise Belt*. Only a Southerner would slather that much mayonnaise on a vegetable *and still refer to it as a salad.*”

Virginia Willis is the author of the critically acclaimed cookbook *Bon AppétitY'all: Recipes from Three Generations of Southern Cooking* (Ten Speed Press, 2008).



red slaw

Recipe development by Loren Wood

Yield: 6 servings

Preparation: 20 minutes

Refrigerate: 1 hour

- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon poppy seeds
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 head red cabbage, shredded
- 2 cups Roasted Beets, cooled, peeled, and chopped (Recipe follows.)
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
- 1 cup sliced radish
- 3 tablespoons thinly sliced red onion

IN A MEDIUM BOWL, whisk together vinegar, mayonnaise, sugar, poppy seeds, and salt. Set aside.

IN A SEPARATE MEDIUM BOWL, combine cabbage, beets, bell pepper, radish, and onion.

POUR vinegar mixture over cabbage mixture; toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving.

roasted beets

Recipe development by Loren Wood

Yield: approximately 2 cups

(depending on beet size)

Preparation: 10 minutes

Bake: 1 hour

Refrigerate: 2 hours

- 1 bunch beets (approximately 3 medium beets)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

PREHEAT oven to 425°.

WASH beets thoroughly. Leave skins on but remove the greens.

PLACE beets in a small baking dish. Toss with olive oil. Sprinkle with sugar and salt.

COVER and bake for 45 to 60 minutes, until a knife can be inserted easily. Cool completely. Refrigerate until needed.

celeriac slaw

Recipe excerpted from *Bon Appétit, Y'all*

by Virginia Willis

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

Preparation: 10 minutes

Refrigerate: up to 8 hours

- 1 medium bulb celeriac (approximately 1½ pounds), peeled* and grated
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon Dijon-style mustard
- 1 tablespoon capers, rinsed and chopped
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
- Coarse salt to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Garnish: additional fresh flat-leaf parsley

IN A BOWL, combine celeriac, mayonnaise, mustard, capers, tarragon, parsley, and lemon zest and juice. Toss to combine. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

COVER and refrigerate for up to 8 hours until ready to serve.

GARNISH with additional parsley, if desired.

**To peel a celeriac bulb, use a chef's knife, trimming away the gnarled brown skin to expose the pale flesh. Before using the peeled bulb, rub it with lemon or soak it in water with lemon juice added to prevent browning.*



mustard slaw

Recipe development by Loren Wood

Yield: 10 servings

Preparation: 10 minutes

Refrigerate: 1 hour

- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/4 cup spicy brown mustard
- 1/4 cup prepared dill relish
- 3 tablespoons Dijon-style mustard
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons minced Vidalia onion
- 1 teaspoon celery seed
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1 (10-ounce) bag angel hair shredded cabbage

IN A MEDIUM BOWL, combine vinegar, brown mustard, dill relish, Dijon-style mustard, sugar, onion, celery seed, salt, pepper, and dry mustard. Set aside.

PLACE cabbage in a large bowl.

POUR mustard mixture over cabbage; toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate mixture for at least 1 hour before serving.





cilantro-lime slaw

Recipe development by Loren Wood

Yield: 6 servings

Preparation: 10 minutes

Refrigerate: 1 hour

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon fresh lime zest
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 head Napa cabbage, thinly sliced
- 1 Granny Smith apple, cored and diced

- 1 tablespoon seeded and diced jalapeño pepper

- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

IN A MEDIUM BOWL, whisk together mayonnaise, vinegar, lime zest, lime juice, sugar, salt, and pepper. Set aside.

IN A SEPARATE BOWL, combine cabbage, apple, and jalapeño.

POUR mayonnaise mixture over cabbage mixture; toss to coat.

Cover and refrigerate mixture for at least 1 hour before serving.

ADD cilantro, tossing to combine, just before serving.

classic coleslaw

Recipe excerpted from

Bon Appétit, Y'all by Virginia Willis

Yield: 6 servings

Preparation: 15 minutes

Refrigerate: 2 hours

- ⅓ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup buttermilk
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon grated Vidalia onion
- ½ teaspoon dry mustard
- ¼ small head green cabbage, cored and finely shredded (approximately 2 cups)
- ¼ small head red cabbage, cored and finely shredded (approximately 2 cups)
- 1 carrot, finely shredded
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper

IN A LARGE BOWL, combine mayonnaise, buttermilk, sugar, vinegar, lemon juice, onion, and dry mustard, whisking until smooth. Add cabbages and carrot; mix well to combine.

Season with salt and pepper. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours before serving.

ADJUST seasoning before serving, if desired.

