

Ensaladilla Rusa



A little bit of history

Ensaladilla rusa -also called Olivier salad- is typically from Russia but so popular and extended in Spain that it's been included in the national Spanish gastronomy and it's a typical salad in Spanish schools and summer camps in Spain.

Nowadays **ensaladilla rusa** is a potato salad, mixed with tuna and mayonnaise as well as other vegetables and it's served as a "ración " and also very commonly as a tapa. It can be found in most bars and any typical Spanish restaurants. But its original ingredients not only were very different (in fact it appears to have barely contained potatoes, if any) but mysterious too.

Ensaladilla rusa was invented in 1860 by Lucien Olivier chef and co-owner of restaurant Hermitage, one of the best known restaurants in Moscow at the time and it would soon become it's hallmark dish. But Mr. Olivier maintained the ingredients of his salad as a state secret, as well as the dressings he used and took this secret to the grave.

There were many that tried to steal his recipe, and the one who got closest to achieve it was one of Olivier's sous-chefs, Ivan Ivanov. Mr. Olivier would go into a room by himself to prepare it. Legend says that on one occasion Mr. Olivier was called out of this room on an urgent matter, an occasion the cook took advantage of to go in and make note of the elements on the table.

SPANISH RECIPES

Once the cook was fired he began working for a less notorious restaurant and tried to emulate his ex-boss' formula unsuccessfully; those who tried it said the dressing was different and the dressing' secret ingredients are still in Olivier's grave.

Curiosities

In 1904 a group of investigators managed to determine the ingredients of **ensaladilla rusa**. They interviewed people who dined in his restaurant and the conclusion of the ingredients was: roast capercaillie, smoked duck, cow tongue, cured bear meat, tails and legs of some crustaceans, shrimp, russian crab, smoked sturgeon, capers, fresh cucumbers, truffles, hard boiled eggs and other vegetables, some of them cooked, some raw. Apparently the vegetables varied according to availability.

As many of those ingredients are unavailable in Spain, **ensaladilla rusa** is defined as a "macedoine" of vegetable and meat products, fish and shellfish, cut brunoise mixed with mayonnaise. The final result depends on the successful or unsuccessfully combination of products.



Original Olivier Salad

SPANISH RECIPES

You will need (4 people)

- 5 medium potatoes
- 1 carrot
- 50g of fresh peas
- 2 spring onions
- 1 handful of chives
- 90g of Bonito del Norte (one can of tuna)
- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- 400g of mayonnaise
- 2 roasted red pepper, sliced

Optional for Garnish:

- 4-5 spears canned white asparagus
- 6-12 green olives, preferably manzanilla

TIP

The key to make the best Ensaladilla Rusa is making a homemade mayonnaise.

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Method

1. Scrub the potatoes to clean off any loose dirt and sand.

2. Pour water into a large pot, cover and bring to a boil on high heat. Place potatoes in the pot and boil them with skins on until they are cooked, but not too soft. Test the doneness by pricking with a fork to make sure they are cooked, but still firm.

Very important: Don't overcook the potatoes or you'll end up with mashed potatoes when mixing your salad.

3. Boil the eggs until hard. Cool the eggs.

4. Drain the water from the pot and add cold water to the pot, covering the potatoes. Change water every few minutes until the potatoes are cool enough to handle with your bare hands. Refrigerate for a few minutes to cool further.

5. Remove from refrigerator and peel potatoes. Cut into small (approximately 1/2 inch) cubes. Return to refrigerator while you prepare the other ingredients.

SPANISH RECIPES

6. Put approximately one and a half cups of mayonnaise into a bowl. Slice one of the roasted peppers into strips, then cut into smaller pieces and add to bowl.
7. Drain tuna thoroughly, then flake with a fork and add to bowl.
8. Drain carrots and peas and add to bowl.
9. Peel 1 egg, chop and add to bowl.
10. Mix all ingredients together.
11. Add the mayonnaise mixture to the potatoes and mix thoroughly. If necessary, add more mayonnaise. Smooth top of potato salad, preparing for decoration.

Traditionally, a thin layer of mayonnaise is spread over the top of the salad using the back side of a large spoon. Slice remaining red pepper into thin strips and arrange on top of salad. Drain the white asparagus and olives. Carefully slice hard-boiled eggs lengthwise. Use to decorate the salad.

