

BEST WAY

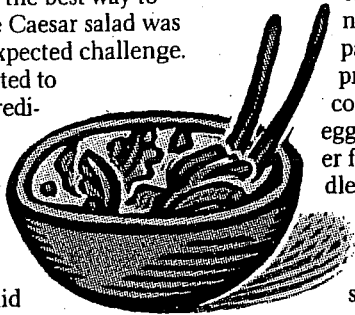
Caesar salad

By Gena Bell

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

the emulsified whisk-and-bowl version.

Our next test compared two batches of this new recipe, but prepared in a food processor. One batch contained one raw egg yolk while the other featured one coddled egg. Most tasters preferred the coddled egg dressing for its slightly stronger anchovy



BILL RUSSELL / The Chronicle

Deciding the best way to prepare Caesar salad was an unexpected challenge. Once we started to research ingredients and methods, we found a huge variety.

Caesar Cardini is said to have first put together this concoction of romaine lettuce, crunchy croutons and an egg-based, anchovy-laced dressing in 1924 when a party of unexpected guests arrived at his Tijuana restaurant.

Julia Child claims to have his original recipe in her book "The Way to Cook" (Knopf, 1989). It calls for coating the romaine leaves in 3 or 4 tablespoons of olive oil, then adding the remaining ingredients and tossing it together by hand. We compared this with another recipe that used a whisk-and-bowl method and a much larger quantity of olive oil.

Both methods had their fans, with the Food department tasters nearly equally divided between the two salads. However, the dressing prepared with a bowl and whisk didn't have the right balance of liquid and oil to form an emulsion. To achieve a thicker, creamier consistency, we increased the amount of olive oil and cut the number of eggs. We then compared this dressing to Child's method, and tasters preferred

flavor, which we can only attribute to the mysteries of food science.

For our final test, we compared the food processor method to the whisk-and-bowl method, using one coddled egg in each batch. The overall winner was the food processor method because of the salad's consistent texture and flavor.

Hints: ■ If possible, use a salad spinner to remove any excess water from the romaine leaves so the dressing will ad-

here better.

■ You can make the dressing ahead, if necessary. In one batch, we made the dressing eight hours before serving the salad, and its flavor was excellent.

Note: If you do not want to use a coddled egg, substitute 1 or 2 teaspoons of mayonnaise.

Gena Bell is a student at Tante Marie's Cooking School in San Francisco.

CAESAR SALAD

INGREDIENTS:

Croutons

- 3 large garlic cloves, put through a garlic press
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cups ½-inch cubes of country-style white bread

Dressing & Salad

- 1 egg
- 2 heads of romaine lettuce
- 2½ tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 8 grindings of black pepper
- 1 small garlic clove, put through a garlic press
- 4 anchovy fillets, minced
- ⅔ cup extra virgin olive oil
- ⅓ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS: To make the

croutons: Preheat the oven to 350°. Mix together the garlic, salt and olive oil in a small bowl. Put the bread cubes on a baking sheet and drizzle the garlic oil over them. Toss to coat. Spread them out in a single layer. Bake for approximately 20 minutes, or until lightly browned and very dry.

Bring a small saucepan of water to a boil. Poke a small pinhole in the large end of the egg. Carefully lower the egg into the boiling water. Cook for 1 minute, then remove the egg with a slotted spoon. Let cool.

Meanwhile, remove the outer dark green leaves and the top 3 inches from the heads of romaine and discard them or set aside for another salad. Break the inner, light green leaves into 3-inch lengths. Rinse under cold tap

water, then spin completely dry in a salad spinner.

Crack the coddled egg directly into a food processor (if there is any cooked white, do not include it). Add the lemon juice, Worcestershire, salt, pepper, garlic and anchovy fillets to the processor and blend for 1 minute.

While the food processor is running, start pouring the olive oil through the feed tube in a steady stream. Blend for about 1 minute, until thick and creamy.

Place the romaine leaves in a salad bowl and toss with the dressing, Parmesan and cooled croutons.

Serves 4 to 6.

PER SERVING: 385 calories, 7 g protein, 10 g carbohydrate, 36 g fat (6 g saturated), 42 mg cholesterol, 475 mg sodium, 1 g fiber.