

How The 'Garbage Salad' Became A Food Trend

By: Hope Ngo

The word "garbage" isn't usually one we associate with edible food, but we're happy to say there are always exceptions to every circumstance, and this is one of them. Per *What's Cooking America*, the idea of a "garbage plate" first began in 1918, when a Rochester, New York restaurant owner named Alexander Tahou created a one-plate meal to serve to diners. It was built on dinner staples — meat, potatoes, and "a few other things".

When Tahou's son Nick took over the restaurant, he renamed the dish the Garbage Plate — a concoction made up of two burger patties and two sides, with choices that included home fries, a macaroni salad, and beans. It may not have been much, but for 1980s Rochester and the University of Rochester crowd that consumed it, it hit the spot. Writer Neil Janowitz describes the Garbage Plate as "warm. Texturally, it's very satisfying. If you get everything together, it's a nice bite on your fork," per *Grub Street*.

The first Garbage Salad was tossed in Chicago



But credit for the salad version of that everything-but-the-kitchen-sink meal didn't come from New York, it came from Chicago steakhouse named *Gene & Georgetti*, who threw together, per the *Chicago Tribune*, a mix of "chopped salami and mozzarella cheese, then added cut-up iceberg lettuce, radishes, black olives, tomatoes, salt, pepper, olive oil and vinegar and garnished it with Parmesan and extra-large shrimp" — or what the publication called a mix of salad ingredients "that might only have come together in a garbage can."

With inflation being what it is, its no surprise that meals like the Garbage Plate; its San Francisco sibling, the Trash Pie — made with flawed ingredients that wouldn't pass muster at other restaurants, from bruised fruit to meat byproducts, per *Eater*; and now the Garbage Salad, are winning the hearts and minds of diners across the country, per *Grub Street*.

So, what is a Garbage Salad, you say?

A Garbage Salad is a good way to finish off leftovers

Think about a salad filled with nothing but bite-sized pieces of things you might find in your fridge, and then putting that in a big bowl, with all the ingredients cut down to roughly the same size, so they can be tossed and consumed with ease and abandon. If that ingredient list sounds too vague, Bon Appétit helpfully put together a list of questions you might want to ask yourself about every ingredient you encounter, like: "Can this thing be eaten raw? It is a vegetable? Is it a fruit? Is it a tender herb? Is it a nut/seed? Has it been previously cooked and is on day 4 in the fridge?" And if you don't know what to season the mix with, Bon Appétit also recommends you use an olive oil vinaigrette to toss.

Of course, a Garbage Salad can be made with a bit of structure, too. ABC7 Chicago helpfully provides a recipe for Garbage Salad that looks pretty much like everything you'd put in a salad, tossed with an upscale dressing. And sure, no one will judge you if you build your Garbage Salad that way, no one will judge — but given what food costs these days, any salad that repurposes ingredients that you might already have in your fridge has the potential to be a hit — you just need to be creative about it.

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