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Beat the heat with a cool summer meal

By Stacey Stein

Summer is finally upon us – along with swapping our sweaters and boots for t-shirts and sandals, the season calls for ditching the hot drinks and warming soups that powered us through winter in favour of cooling beverages and light foods to energize us on sweltering summer days.

“In the summer we're looking for foods that have a higher water content, so lots of vegetables and fruit,” says registered dietitian Shannon Crocker. “Lightened up dishes that you eat cold versus hot cooked foods can help you feel a little bit cooler,” she adds.

Here are some ideas for dishes and drinks that will keep you feeling hydrated and fuelled as the mercury rises.

Drinks

Fruit or veggie-infused water is a great way to keep cool in the summer and there are many combinations you can try out. Crocker recommends a mix of strawberries, watermelon and mint for a light, refreshing summer drink.

With its high water content, honeydew melon is a refreshing summer fruit (it's also a good source of vitamin C and potassium). It's the star ingredient in this honeydew and coconut frappé (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/beverages/honeydew-coconut-frappe>), which also features mint leaves, coconut whipped cream and crushed ice, making it even more cooling.

For many people, summer is synonymous with frappuccinos. This morning mocha smoothie (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/beverages/morning-mocha-smoothie>) is a great alternative to the traditional coffee shop frap – along with a hit of caffeine, it also offers a nutritional boost thanks to the inclusion of Nordica Smooth Plain.

Appetizers

Summer doesn't mean giving up soup – instead, forgo heavy winter soups in favour of a light gazpacho made with a blend of summer veggies like fresh tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. Served cold, this soup is refreshing on a hot summer day – try livening it up even more by serving with shaved parmesan cheese sprinkled on top.

Shrimp canapés (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/appetizers/jumbo-shrimp-canapes-with-chili-lime-cream>) make for an elegant appetizer, perfect for a summer patio party. To lighten up this dish, replace the whipped cream with Nordica Smooth Plain.

Another delicious summertime app is zucchini bruschetta (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/appetizers/zucchini-bruschetta-with-canadian-swiss-cheese>), which can be made on the barbecue – you can even prepare the zucchini mixture and grill the bread ahead of time and then warm everything up on the barbecue just before serving. Zucchini also has a high water content, making it a great cooling veggie.

Sides

Salads are the perfect light accompaniment to a summertime meal. This raspberry pesto pasta salad (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/lunch/raspberry-pesto-pasta-salad>) is a departure from typical pasta salads, and features a quintessential summer berry to boot. Raspberries not only give this salad some extra pizzazz, they are also chock full of antioxidants, vitamins and fiber. To make this a lighter side, feel free to skip the chicken breast.

This grilled potato salad (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/appetizers/creamy-herb-grilled-potato-salad>) offers an updated twist on a traditional crowd pleaser. Loaded with parsley and using sour cream in place of mayonnaise, this potato salad is light and herby, perfect for summer. If you want to lighten it up more, Crocker recommends replacing the sour cream with Nordica Smooth Plain. Make it ahead on the barbecue and eat it cold the next day for a cooling side dish.

Mains

Powerbowls are very popular, and with good reason – combining veggies, grains and legumes, they pack a serious nutritional punch while providing lots of plant-based protein. For a healthy and light summer main, try this southwest power bowl (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/lunch/southwest-power-bowl>) – aside from including good-for-you ingredients like corn, tomatoes, avocado, and black beans, this power bowl gets an extra kick of protein from a lime crema made with Nordica Smooth Plain. Try turning up the fun factor at a summer party with a “DIY” power bowl bar (similar to a salad bar), where guests can create their own individual bowls. “This is a great do-it-yourself meal,” says Crocker.

Although barbecue season and grilled meats seem to go hand-in-hand, why not change things up by grilling cheese instead? Halloumi cheese provides a healthy grilling alternative and, paired with a rainbow of veggies, makes for a light summer main in this grilled halloumi and veggie salad (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/lunch/grilled-halloumi-cheese-vegetable-salad>). You can grill the veggies on the barbecue ahead of time – serve them cold along with the quinoa, and then top it all off with the grilled Halloumi.

If you’re looking to include some meat protein in your main, but still want to keep things light, these grilled chicken and caprese skewers (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/lunch/grilled-chicken-caprese-skewers>) fit the bill. The tomatoes and bocconcini jazz up both the flavour and visual appeal of the skewers (try using small multi-coloured tomatoes), making them an ideal main if you’re hosting. Even better, you can make them ahead of time and serve them cold on a hot summer night.

Dessert

Nothing says summer like capping off a meal with watermelon – extremely high in water content and naturally sweet, it makes for a light, refreshing finish to a summertime meal. For something different, Crocker suggests adding a squeeze of lime juice to your watermelon. “Lime and watermelon go really well together,” she says.

If you enjoy fruit at the end of a summer meal, try pairing strawberries with Nordica Smooth Lemon or Nordica Smooth Vanilla for dipping – this makes for a light, simple and cooling finish to your dinner.

In the mood for a cool summer treat with a touch of decadence? Try making these mini chocolate cherry shortbread ice cream sandwiches. (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/desserts/mini-chocolate-cherry-shortbread-ice-cream-sandwiches>) “By making them mini, you can have something indulgent, but in an appropriate portion size,” says Crocker.

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