



rao's on the grill

Perfectly Simple Italian Recipes from My Family to Yours

Frank Pellegrino, Jr.



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This book is dedicated in loving memory to Robert Ubriaco, my main man, "Bubbles." I know two things: first, he is running the pearly gates with St. Peter, and second, he was the angel watching over me while I prepared this book.



Contents

[DEDICATION](#)

[FOREWORD](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[appetizers and salads](#)

[beef](#)

[pork](#)

[veal](#)

[chicken](#)

[seafood](#)

[pasta](#)

[pizza and friends](#)

[vegetables](#)

[desserts](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#)

[INDEX](#)

Foreword

grilling, barbeque, and cooking out

THESE ARE words that conjure up mouthwatering thoughts that enter our minds when we think of relaxing with family and friends.

It may seem strange to think of grilling or cooking out when we think of Rao's, a small intimate restaurant in the heart of New York City, without a patio or a terrace, but it's not strange or surprising to me.

Vincent Rao, my uncle, was an avid cook who loved to use his homemade grill outside the family restaurant. Vincent taught me how to use a grill to make mouthwatering concoctions we both loved. Always fond of a good steak, Uncle Vincent bought whole sides of beef from the local A&P. He had equipped the Saloon with a band saw to cut steaks to the thickness that was appropriate for the type of grilling he planned to do. "The Saloon" is what our family called Rao's restaurant. Rao's, which was started by my grandfather Louis Rao in 1896, is now the oldest restaurant in America that has never moved and has been continuously owned by one family.

Uncle Vincent and his brother, my uncle Louis, were the middle generation of the family that brought the restaurant through the twentieth century.

It was Uncle Vincent who made my taste buds tingle when he taught me his love for all things grilled. A steak sandwich in the wee hours of the morning on the way home from a party was a great way to end an evening. During the holidays or on pleasant summer nights, Uncle Vincent would fire up the grill, standing with his trademark cowboy hat on his head, and deliver delectable delights to all.

In July of each year during the 1940s and '50s, the streets around Rao's were closed to traffic for the religious feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, lights were strung across the streets, and food and sundry stands were set up to feed and please the thousands of pilgrims who came to honor Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in the church around the corner on 115th Street. To assist the people who opened stands and sold items such as heros, zeppoles, and pizza, my uncles closed the kitchen and just sold liquid refreshments.

Uncle Vincent could not resist joining the outdoor food scene. As a very young boy I helped him conjure up delightful savory foods on his homemade grill. The grill, which was made for him by a local tradesman, was heavy-duty steel, eight-feet wide, three-feet deep, and filled with charcoal. Everything went on that grill during the feast—steaks, chops, chicken, sweetbreads, and even a few secret parts of the cow and pig! On regular grilling days, steaks and chops were the norm, but during the feast everything was fair game for the grill.

There was a small garage between the Saloon and the home my uncles shared with "Mama Jake," my grandmother, Francesca Rao. Uncle Vincent always kept his new and ever-present Cadillac there, using it for his daily trips to shop and bank. I once swapped his Cadillac for my Corvette to go on a short trip. He loved the idea once he remembered how to shift gears on a straight stick car.

With my uncle Vincent's lessons firmly planted in my mind, I began my own love affair with outdoor grilling. It has become a family fun fest ever since. I have learned to grill everything from steaks, chops, and fish, to fennel and vegetables. It has been an adventure to experiment, as well as a refreshing and classic way to enjoy family fun. Everything savory is made even more delectable on the grill. As you will see in the following pages, some surprising items—even desserts—can be cooked on the grill. In this book you will also find some of the legendary recipes that come from the restaurant, grilled!

I think Louis and Vincent are keeping a watchful eye on us from heaven and are amazed, I am sure, at how their little Saloon has grown. It has been fun for me, Frank, Sr., and Frank, Jr. to not only keep their flame alive in the restaurants that bear their names in New York and Las Vegas, but also to keep them in our hearts every time we fire up the “Barbie.”

I feel like Uncle Vincent is standing next to me and guiding me through each turn on the grill. He must be there—how else does everything turn out “just right”?

I hope you will find grilling the Rao’s way as enjoyable as we do.

—RON STRACI, CO-OWNER

“Happiness is gratitude manifested in the moment....”

—FRANK

Introduction

my journey to the grill

WELCOME TO *Rao's On the Grill*. The inspiration for this book started for me as a child growing up in a traditional Italian American family whose forefathers emigrated from Southern Italy to East Harlem, New York, then to the south shore of Long Island. I received my invitation to work at Rao's Bar & Grill in the summer of 1982 from my father, Grand-aunt Annie, and Uncle Vincent. Little did I know how that summer would define the next thirty years of my life both personally and professionally.

My first major career accomplishment was learning how to sweep the dining-room floor after service to avoid being scolded by Annie McGuire the next day, which happened often. She had a knack for finding some leftover debris I missed in an obscure corner of the room.

In addition to sweeping the floor, I learned how to set a table, polish silverware and glasses, avoid being bit by Rip or stumbling over Jocko, the German shepherd and black Lab that kept watchful eyes over the restaurant during the day. As time progressed and my skills sharpened, I was tasked to fill guests' water glasses and remove dishes from their tables when they were through with each course, and crumb the tables meticulously with a folded napkin. (Most of the remnants fell to the floor, hence my daily scolding from McGuire.)

Eventually my experience and the lack of other candidates afforded me a promotion to a waiter, which allowed me to broaden my career even further. My responsibilities included learning about the kitchen and food preparation. I was now responsible for preparing appetizers for the guests! If I only had a dollar for every clam I have opened since then...



In time, I became the manager of the East Harlem restaurant. I remained part of Rao's even after opening my first restaurant in New York City, Baldoria.

I cherished the late-night family dinners prepared by my aunt Anna and special guest chefs, who were truly a part of our family. Those dinners introduced me to the nuances of our cuisine as well as other regional Italian dishes and cooking techniques. Despite Rao's being one of the toughest reservations in town, whoever walked into the restaurant or sat at our bar would be invited to have a dish of whatever was on our table. Breaking bread with others made friendships I've maintained to this day.

Other fond memories of my childhood take me back to summers with my family, particularly at the home of my grandparents, Frank and Ida Pellegrino. It was forever bustling with family and friends morning, noon, and night, seven days a week. Along with friends and family came a great deal of hospitality and food.

Imagine being a kid surrounded by great food and terrific personalities all the time: The experiences helped shape who I am today, and continue to be incorporated into my life and work as a restaurateur on a daily basis. When I find myself in one of those rare moments when I am alone, I think back to my childhood memories of a home filled with company, conversation, and food. These wonderful memories have fueled my inspiration to share many of our family's and restaurant's recipes in a fun and easy way. The goal of this book is to inspire people to get together, prepare great meals, and have fun!

La Vita Al Fresco

One of the wonderful things about living “la vita al fresco” is the opportunity to be outside and enjoy the weather, especially when it's warm and sunny and all is right with the world. Even when the weather is not perfect, dedicated grillers always find a way to grill. When I lived full-time in New York, I grilled in the dead of winter.

Rao's On the Grill shows you how to use your grill to its fullest to create dishes that you may never have thought of making outdoors. I want to show you how to make many of Rao's signature dishes, with the “kiss of the grill” added to their already delicious flavor profiles. Take advantage of summer produce by making pasta (and even a salad or two) on the grill. I'll even teach you how to turn your grill into an outdoor oven to make a surprising array of desserts. And, of course, I'll provide you with plenty of recipes for sizzling steaks and chops, tasty chicken, and delicious seafood.

Living in Las Vegas where the weather is temperate to hot most of the time (we have been known to have a little wind every now and then), I can cook outdoors almost every day of the year. Cooking and dining al fresco is a way of life, and I have an outdoor kitchen setup that I use as much as possible. Outdoor living areas are becoming more and more popular, and many al fresco setups have all of the amenities of the indoor kitchen.





But you don't need a complete outdoor kitchen to use this book, just a grill. The biggest benefit to cooking outdoors, aside from the terrific flavor, is that in hot weather, you will keep the indoor kitchen cool. There are no ovens to turn on or ignited burners to heat up the room. Cooking the main course on the grill can also be a boon at a holiday meal because it frees up the inside oven for other dishes.

You and Your Grill

Let's not debate the qualities of a charcoal grill versus a gas grill. Both are great. No doubt about it: The charcoal grill does apply more smoky flavor. But you can't beat the convenience of a gas grill.

If you are purchasing a gas grill, buy one with the most bells and whistles that you can afford. When comparing brands, choose the one with the most cooking surface space and highest amount of BTUs (British Thermal Units, the measurement for heat output). To me, a side burner is a must for cooking sauces and pasta, although I often cook with skillets, pots, and pans directly on the grill grate.

A round body design is more efficient than a square one for a charcoal grill. You want a model that controls heat with vents, not a grill with a stationary cooking grate.

Keep the grill clean. Remove the cooking grate(s) every couple of months and give it a good scrubbing with hot water and a scouring pad. Or, if you have the time, use oven cleaner to remove the built-up grime overnight. There are cleaning products for the interior of your grill, too, but hot water and a scouring pad, along with elbow grease and a hose, will suffice.

The Right Utensils

Over the years, I have learned countless cooking tips from my family. Perhaps the most useful is how to sauce food properly. Too often, the sauce is poured over the main course as an afterthought. I was taught to "marry" the meat (or chicken or seafood) with the sauce. The technique is a simple one and easily applied to grilling: Cook or grill the meat until it is almost done, then add it to a simmering sauce to complete the cooking *and* infuse the meat with flavor.

I often finish pasta in the same way: Cook the pasta according to the package directions until it is almost, but not quite, al dente. Drain the pasta and add it to sauce that is simmering in a large skillet. Cook a minute or two more until al dente and let it absorb some of the sauce in the process.

To cook these dishes on the grill, you will need a skillet and a roasting pan, both entirely made

from materials that will not melt when touched by flame (avoid skillets with hard plastic handles). Be sure that the skillet and roasting pan that you designate for grilling will fit on your grill. The smoky heat of a charcoal grill can discolor the metal, so you may want to keep a skillet and roasting pan just for outdoor cooking.

A large, deep skillet is great for cooking sauces for meat, poultry, and seafood main courses and for pasta. Use one with at least a 12-inch diameter and at least 2-inch-deep sides.

Use a large flameproof roasting pan, about 18 × 13 inches, for cooking larger amounts of food. For the best results, use a pan that is made of triple-ply (three layers) metal, because the bottom layer should be relatively thick to withstand direct heat from the grill without warping. For making pizza, use a metal 14-inch perforated pizza pan.

In addition to these two cooking utensils that are unique to my way of cooking al fresco, you will need the standard grilling equipment:

Long kitchen tongs, preferably spring-loaded, for turning food

A meat fork

A metal spatula

Protective gloves

A silicone brush for applying glazes

A sturdy grill brush for cleaning the grill

Metal and/or bamboo skewers

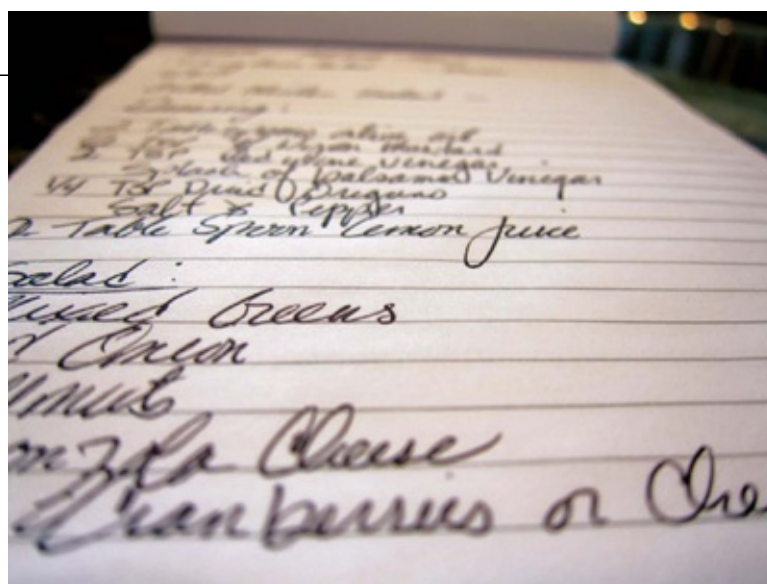
Temperature Control

The heat is easy to adjust on a gas grill, which is one of the many reasons why many people prefer it to a charcoal grill, where the heat is controlled in a more low-tech manner.

The temperature of a gas grill is maintained with the twist of the thermostat. Most gas grills have a thermometer in their lid that shows the temperature at a glance, but not all of them have numerals on the dial and give a color-coded heat range. If you want an accurate temperature reading, put an oven thermometer on the cooking grate in the area where you are cooking the food.

Whether you use briquettes or hardwood charcoal chunks is a matter of choice, but consider this: Charcoal burns hot and then drops in temperature very quickly, so it should be reserved for recipes where the food is cooked in a fast 20-minute window. Briquettes are evenly formed and formulated for longer burning.





The best way to build a fire is with a charcoal chimney. No serious grilling fan would ever use charcoal lighting fluid, which can impart a strange chemical flavor to your food. Buy a large chimney that holds at least 6 pounds of charcoal briquettes (or about 100 briquettes); some chimneys are too small.

After lighting the charcoal according to the manufacturer's directions, let the briquettes burn until they are coated with gray ash. Dump the coal out onto the charcoal grate (the smaller grate in the bottom of the grill), but do not spread them out to the edges of the grill. Leave a perimeter around the edges of the charcoal mound as a cooler cooking zone. Chicken and steaks, in particular, render fat that drips onto the coals, causing flare-ups—the bane of every backyard cook. If this happens, just move the food to the cooler zone so the fat drips around, but not onto, the coals.

To maintain the heat during longer grilling periods, add about 25 briquettes (or the equivalent of charcoal chunks) to the fire every 45 minutes or so. You can use the oven thermometer trick mentioned previously, or stick an old-fashioned deep-frying thermometer (with a metal probe and a glass dial) through the top vent in the lid.

Speaking of the vents in a charcoal grill lid, do you know what they are for? They control the oxygen flow inside the grill. ~~Fire needs oxygen to burn. Keep the vents wide open, and the oxygen will~~ feed the fire and keep it burning hot. For lower heat (useful for long periods of cooking), close the vents halfway. The only time the vents should be closed is when you want to cut off the heat to extinguish the flame and shut the grill down.

Keep your lid on! Cooking with the grill lid open is like baking with the oven door open—all of the heat escapes. *It is very important to keep the grill lid closed as much as possible* while you grill to trap the heat and maintain a steady temperature. I remind you to do this at the beginning of the cooking period of every recipe. If you add other ingredients or equipment to the grill, always close the grill afterward. Cooking with the lid closed also cuts down on the oxygen flow and discourages flare-ups.

You can apply the oven analogy to grilling temperatures, too. Think of your outdoor grill like an oven—you use a range of temperatures to bake, so why not do the same with your grilling? It is helpful to think about the heat level before you put the food on the grate:

High 500°–600°F

Medium-High 450°– 500°F

Medium 350°–450°F

Low 300°–350°F

On the Grill

There are two main kinds of grilling: direct cooking and indirect cooking.

DIRECT COOKING means that the food is cooked directly over the heat source, be it propane flames or coals. This creates that deeply browned, crusty surface that makes your mouth water. This method is best used for food that will cook within 30 minutes or so—steaks, chops, boneless chicken breasts, and seafood.

INDIRECT COOKING means that the food is cooked away from the heat source. For a gas grill, the instruction booklet will give you some guidance on how to best set up your model for indirect cooking, based on the number of burners. In general, turn one burner off to create a cool area on the grill, and keep the other burner(s) on to provide the heat. The food is placed on the cool area of the grill and cooked by the generated heat from the heat source. Sometimes the food is cooked in a pan, so adjust the size of the indirect cooking area to fit the utensil by the number of burners you turn off.

In a charcoal grill, light the briquettes in a charcoal chimney. Dump the coals on one side of the grill, leaving the other side empty. Put the cooking grate in place. The food will be cooked on the cooler, coal-free side of the grill.

After preheating the grill—allow at least 15 minutes for a gas grill and 20 minutes for the coals in the chimney to turn gray—you are ready to cook. Always brush the cooking grate clean with the brush. Frankly, it is a better idea to get in the habit of brushing the grate clean after each use, before the cooked-on food has a chance to solidify. Oil the cooking grate thoroughly but lightly with a wad of paper towels dipped in pure olive oil or vegetable oil. When cooking seafood, be sure that the grill grate is extra-clean and more generously oiled so the food doesn't stick. The oil should not drip onto the heat source. Don't use aerosol grill spray unless you remove the grates from the grill to spray them—and that can be a hassle.

The Right Ingredients

Italian cooking is renowned for making the best of simple ingredients, but that means that the ingredients have to be top-notch. Here are some of the foods that I cook with often, and some tips for choosing the best available ingredients to ensure success.

CANNED TOMATOES: For most people, fresh ripe tomatoes with a lot of flavor are only available for a few weeks every summer. Luckily, canned tomatoes are also a great ingredient, if you buy the right ones. I prefer imported Italian whole tomatoes from the San Marzano region near Mount Vesuvius near Naples. The volcanic soil gives the tomatoes a full, almost meaty, flavor and firm texture. A producer can process the San Marzano tomato variety without its actually having been grown in the region, so look carefully at the label to be sure that you are getting the real deal. The labeling should include *Pomodoro San Marzano dell'Agro Sarnese-Nocerino*, which indicates that they were grown in the Valle del Sarno region, and the Italian D.O.C. emblem, which confirms that they were grown in that specific designated and controlled area.

OLIVE OIL: Olive oil is an essential ingredient in Italian cooking, but Americans have come to understand that all olive oils aren't the same. Extra-virgin olive oil is from the first pressing of the olives, has a thick body and full flavor, and usually has a greenish cast. I use it when I want the olive flavor to be prominent. For dishes where the olive flavor should be more subdued, I use regular olive oil, produced from the second pressing of the olives. This golden-colored oil has a lighter viscosity and flavor than extra-virgin, but that doesn't necessarily mean it is a substandard product. (It used to be called "pure olive oil" until the olive oil industry felt that its name made it seem impure when compared to extra-virgin. I still call it pure olive oil.) Look around for brands you like; my favorite for both extra-virgin and regular oil is Berio.

SHRIMP: When I entertain (and cook at the restaurant), I like to use very large shrimp. They exude a feeling of abundance and make the guest feel special—and they withstand the heat of the grill without overcooking better than small shrimp.

Shrimp are sold by size; shrimp labeled "21/25 count" indicates that there are 21 to 25 shrimp per pound, and these are sometimes called "jumbo." However, depending on the region, the names do not always correspond to sizes, so it is best to buy shrimp by the number. The letter "U" in a size means "under," so U-12 indicates supersized shrimp that run under 12 shrimp to the pound.

You can buy a range of frozen shrimp in different sizes and stages of preparation (peeled and deveined, deveined but unpeeled "E-Z peel," and shell-on) at your supermarket and wholesale clubs. Shrimp is an excellent product.

SALT: I cook with coarse kosher salt because it is pure and unadulterated. Also, the large flakes make it easy for you to see how much you have added to a dish.

PARMESAN CHEESE: Your Parmesan cheese should be from the Parma region of Italy, labeled "Parmigiano-Reggiano," with the name imprinted in the rind. Otherwise, you could be buying Parmesan from Wisconsin or Argentina, which are okay, but don't have the tiny crystals of nutty flavor found in the real thing. Buy chunks of Parmigiano-Reggiano and grate the cheese yourself just before using. And let's pretend that canned grated Parmesan doesn't exist.

Dried Versus Fresh Herbs and Spices

We use dried and fresh herbs and spices based upon availability and ease of use. We try to use fresh whenever possible, because it enhances the flavors of our ingredients in the way that only fresh products can. But that's not to say that dried herbs don't do in a pinch when certain herbs are not in

season.

~~To store most fresh herbs, place the stems in a glass of water, like a bouquet, put a plastic bag loosely over the glass, and store in the refrigerator. Basil is very delicate and doesn't like the cold, so it is best to store it in a glass of water at room temperature. Wash, dry, and chop fresh herbs just before using, as some herbs discolor as soon as they are chopped. I prefer to tear basil into appropriately sized pieces and drop them right into the food just before serving.~~

Dried herbs do go stale over time, so don't buy more than you will use in a six-month period. Store them in a cool, dark place (but not the refrigerator) away from the stove, as heat makes them go stale more quickly. Before using a dried herb, rub it between your palms to release its oil and aroma.

ingredients/expert advice

When purchasing ingredients for any of these recipes, we suggest that you find a great local fishmonger and butcher to help you make your choices. It's best to talk to experts and tell them what you're preparing, because they can help you choose what will work best for your recipe. Part of the Rao's legacy is building relationships, and we encourage *you* to build relationships with the people from whom you purchase your food. Get to know them, ask them questions, and take their advice.

During our trips out to the Hamptons, we purchase most of our seafood from The Clamman (235A North Sea Rd, Southampton, 631.283.6669). The owner is a young man named Paul Cutter Koster, who goes by Cutter. His father was the original Clam man, and Cutter has followed in the family business. We asked him for some tips on picking fish.

For whole fish, look for red gills and clear eyes. For both whole fish and fillets, there shouldn't be a fishy smell. The texture of the fish should be firm and translucent, not sticky or slimy.

Oysters and clams are often eaten raw, so you want to be extra careful. Be sure the shellfish were harvested from clean waters. The fishmonger should be able to tell the source from the shellfish packaging. Sniff the oyster—if it smells bad, then it is bad. If they look dry, then they've been stored too long. The Clamman serves a lot of, well, clams, but buy your shellfish from places with high turnover to ensure the freshest products available.

Dominic has been the butcher at Rao's for nearly twenty years. He's been a butcher for forty-five. But being the butcher at Rao's means more than just cutting the meat in the morning and calling it a day. Dominic is on hand during dinner service, cutting meat to order as each guest comes in. He also acts as sort of sous-chef for Executive Chef Dino Gatto, prepping ingredients for dishes as needed. His advice on getting a good piece of meat? "If you go into a supermarket and they have a butcher, your best bet is to—I don't mean bribe the butcher—buy him a cup of coffee. He'll be pleased to make something for you," especially if he knows you.

Some Tips From Dominic

- > Cook meats with the fat on for flavor, then trim the fat off before serving.
- > Don't be afraid of different cuts, from flank and skirt steak to hanger or chicken steaks (sometimes called the underblade). With the right marinade, these cuts of meat are so flavorful and juicy.

- > When it comes to slicing a flank or skirt steak, you have to cut it properly, against the grain and on a bias. “Otherwise,” Dominic says, “it’s like chewing bubblegum.”
- > Find an independent shop that deals with whole sides of beef. That way you can ask for exactly what you want. Take fillets, for example. They can come as steaks, but they can come on the bones as well. At a boutique shop, you can say, “Cut me a sirloin with the fillet on it.” The sirloin with the fillet plus the bone can be really exquisite.
- > To save money, always buy in bulk. Buy a big piece and the butcher will slice it for free.



Grill Marks: the professional touch

When you get a steak at a fine restaurant, it is seared with attractive crosshatch marks from the hot grill grate. It is easy to accomplish this technique at home to give your grilled foods a professional look. Food that has a mostly flat surface works best to show off your efforts—steak, chop, salmon and other thick fish steaks, and boneless and skinless chicken

breasts.

Be sure that the cooking grate is very hot. Lightly oil the grate. (You can simply use oil, but beef or pork fat trimmings from a steak or chop work, too. Grab the fat with long tongs and rub it against the hot grate until it renders and slicks the grate surface.) Arrange the food on the grate, positioning it at a 45-degree angle to the grate. Cover the grill and cook until the underside of the food is seared with marks, 1 to 2 minutes. Now rotate the food 90 degrees, cover, and cook to sear the food with crosshatch marks, 1 to 2 minutes more. Flip the food over and repeat. (Actually, if you don't crosshatch the second side, no one will know; one side will always be facing down on the plate.)



appetizers and salads

SALADS ARE A MAINSTAY OF OUTDOOR EATING. THEY WHET EVERYONE'S appetite for what's to come later in the meal, and they can act as excellent side dishes to the main course. The best part is, they can easily be prepared ahead of time so that the host has more time to spend with guests. Several of these dishes are inspired by the appetizer menu of Rao's, such as Grilled Red Peppers with Pignoli and Raisins, and Grilled Seafood Salad. Now you can have Rao's outdoors.

[CRAB COCKTAIL IN RADICCHIO CUPS](#) [GRILLED SEAFOOD SALAD](#) [GRILLED SHRIMP COCKTAIL](#) [SHRIMP SALAD WITH LEMON VINAIGRETTE](#) [TUNA AND CANNELLINI BEAN SALAD](#) [EGG AND VEGETABLE SALAD](#) [GREEN BEAN AND POTATO SALAD](#) [MACARONI SALAD](#) [RAO'S PASTA SALAD WITH TOMATOES, MOZZARELLA, AND BASIL](#) [TOMATO AND RED ONION SALAD](#) [CREAMY TORTELLINI SALAD WITH DILL AND WALNUTS](#) [SUMMER TORTELLINI SALAD](#) [GRILLED ROMAINE SALAD](#) [GRILLED RED PEPPERS WITH PIGNOLI AND RAISINS](#)

crab cocktail in radicchio cups

Makes 4 servings

Calling this light and tasty dish crab cocktail is really unfair, as it bears no resemblance to the kind that is covered in horseradish-spiked ketchup. The crabmeat filling can also be served on Belgian endive leaves for a finger-food appetizer.

1 cup jumbo lump crabmeat, picked over for cartilage and shells

5 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil

Juice of ½ lemon

2 tablespoons mayonnaise

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons freshly cooked or thawed frozen peas

½ teaspoon finely diced celery

½ teaspoon finely diced red bell pepper

½ teaspoon pitted and finely diced black olives

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

4 large radicchio leaves

8 cherry tomatoes, halved

Chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley for garnish

- 1** Put the crabmeat in a large bowl and flake it well by hand. Add 1 teaspoon of the oil and the lemon juice and mix.
- 2** Stir in the mayonnaise and mustard, and mix again. Add the peas, celery, bell pepper, and olives and mix. Season to taste with salt and pepper. The salad can be prepared up to 4 hours ahead, covered with plastic wrap, and refrigerated.
- 3** Place each radicchio leaf on a plate. Fill each leaf with equal amounts of the crabmeat mixture and drizzle each with 1 teaspoon of the remaining oil. Garnish with the cherry tomato halves and sprinkle with the parsley. Serve immediately.

Makes 4 to 6 servings

Seafood Salad is one of Rao's signature dishes and difficult to improve on. But, I like the touch of smoky flavor provided by grilling. This salad should be a mainstay of your entertaining repertoire. Perfect seafood, dressed with a light and bright-tasting dressing, can't be topped for summer dining.

Marinade

½ cup dry white wine

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Juice of 1 lemon

6 jumbo (U-16 count) shrimp, peeled and deveined

3 calamari sacs, cleaned, head and tentacles removed

3 lobster tails, about 8 ounces each, thawed if necessary

⅓ cup jumbo lump crabmeat, shredded and picked through for cartilage and shells

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon finely chopped red bell pepper

1 teaspoon finely chopped celery

1 teaspoon finely chopped black olives

1 teaspoon minced garlic

Juice of 2 lemons

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

- 1** Prepare an outdoor grill for direct cooking over medium-high heat (450°F).
- 2 To make the marinade:** Whisk together the wine, olive oil, and lemon juice in a glass or stainless steel bowl. Add the shrimp and calamari and stir to coat with the marinade. Refrigerate for 15 minutes, no longer.
- 3** Place a lobster tail, shell side down, on a cutting board. Using a large sharp knife, split the tail lengthwise just to the shell, but do not cut all the way through. Slide a metal skewer through the tail meat on one side of the tail lengthwise—this keeps the tail from curling up when cooked. Repeat with the remaining lobster tails.

- 4** Brush the cooking grate clean and lightly oil the grill. Put the lobsters on the grill, shell side down. Grill, with the lid closed as much as possible, until the shells begin to turn red, about 4 minutes. Flip, cover, and grill until the lobster shells are completely red and the meat looks opaque, about minutes more. Remove from the grill and let cool. Split each tail in half, remove the lobster meat and roughly chop the meat, discarding the shells. Put the lobster meat in a large serving bowl.
- 5** While the lobster is cooling, remove the calamari and shrimp from the marinade; discard the marinade. Place the calamari and shrimp on the grill. Grill, with the lid closed as much as possible until they begin to turn opaque around the edges, about 3 minutes. Flip, close the lid, and continue cooking until the calamari and shrimp are opaque, 3 to 4 minutes more. Transfer to a plate and let cool.
- 6** Slice the cooked calamari and shrimp, discarding tails, crosswise into ¼-inch-thick rings. Add to the lobster meat, along with the shrimp and crabmeat. Drizzle with the olive oil. Add the bell pepper, celery, olives, and garlic and mix. Pour the lemon juice over the salad and mix again. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate until chilled, at least 1 hour and up to 4 hours. Sprinkle with the parsley and serve chilled.



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