

No Fear: Spinach Salad with Roasted Butternut Squash and Maple Dijon Vinaigrette



I do a lot of things even though I'm scared of them. I ride airplanes, even though I'm terrified of flying. I write this food blog even though I'm terrified of being judged negatively by my food. I got married even though I was terrified of marriage. I had a baby even though I was terrified of being tired all the time. On the other hand, I rarely drink because I have a fear of being out of control. I don't break the rules because I have a fear of getting in trouble. But how much do we let fear manage what we do or don't do?

So this thing happened about 6 weeks ago and it was/is a big thing. I've been keeping it to myself for a while but when the tech guy at school, who I'm not sure even knows my daughter's name, came up to me to confirm the rumor of this big thing

that happened 6 weeks ago, I think it's safe to say that the 'jig is up'. Six weeks ago, a professional opportunity dropped into my lap and I couldn't ignore it. Try as I might, I just couldn't ignore it. I wasn't looking for a job. I have a job. I have a job I like that I think I'm pretty good at. I get to work with people I generally really like; who make me laugh out loud on a daily basis. But then I got a call offering me a huge professional opportunity, which would have been a no-brainer except for this one very big hiccup—the job is in LA. If you've been reading this blog at all, you'll know my family and I live in Miami. We are here because my husband is in the middle of getting his PhD in Marine Biology from the University of Miami. We've been here almost 3 years. I like it enough. We've always said we didn't want this to be our permanent place. Miami is nice and all but it's not where we want to raise our children. Before this call, the only guarantee we had once my husband finished his PhD is that there is no guarantee. In the back of our minds, we always thought that we would go anywhere he got a post-doc or a job; be it Australia, Israel Hawaii or North Carolina. But we're nearly 3 years into a 4.5 year PhD so we didn't REALLY think about it but then this thing landed in my lap and then we were forced to think about it.

The job has all the things a person looks for in a job—prestigious school, giant promotion, room for growth, resources and is located in sunny LA. But there's just this one thing. My husband can't leave his PhD program. So the question came to be: How much are we willing to sacrifice for a job? How much are we willing to sacrifice for our family's future? If I said 'yes', that meant that I would be in LA with Siona for a year without my partner; my love. If I said 'no', that meant that I was passing up a major opportunity for myself and also, a guaranteed future for my family. How does a person make that kind of decision?

First, you take a trip to LA. Who wouldn't want to say 'yes'

after an all-expense paid 4 days in Beverly Hills? Then you talk . . . and you talk . . . and you talk. Then you come to realize that the only reason you and your husband can come up with for NOT taking this opportunity is fear and damn it, I will not miss out on this opportunity of a lifetime because of fear. I refuse to live like that.

What will Shabbatot (shabbats) be like without my best friend for roughly a year? What will it be like in a new city and a new job without my partner? How will I be a 'single' parent for roughly a year? How will I do it? I've been asked these questions MULTIPLE times by MULTIPLE people and I don't have any answer except, "It will be hard. It will be so. very. hard. But then, Gd willing, it won't be. But in the meantime, I will need your support. I will need everything you're willing to give." I am terrified to start this new chapter without my partner standing beside me but the really incredible good news is that we will still be together, we just won't *be* together all the time. I will need to remind myself of this on a constant basis.

So, in roughly 8 months time, at the end of June, we will pack up our Miami life, keep some of it here and ship some of it to LA. Then, we will load ourselves into an RV and drive across the country to LA (yes, we are driving cross-country to LA in an RV. Dreams really do come true. Those will be some fun posts, I hope.) because what the hell are we doing with this life if we're not going to live it up, right?



Morning rituals with Dada.



Siona and JFK on our trip to LA (I did not mean for that to rhyme).

So, with all that being said, life is going to get interesting and a bit tough around this time next year. I probably won't have the time to make mini grain-free pies with mixed berries or Sriracha cheddar sauce but I will have time to make salads. I will probably live on salads. Why make life harder than it needs to be, right? Back in my single days, I lived on salads so I might need to bring out the old repertoire. But, I have to admit, the salads of my 20s were pretty boring and certainly would NEVER have contained roasted butternut squash or anything having to do with fruit. I also NEVER made my own salad dressings but now that I'm becoming more and more comfortable with my cooking skills, a salad dressing is a piece of cake.



Imperfect yet perfect



After the roast.



Getting everyone on board.



Up close and personal



Reading for a healthy feast.

Spinach Salad with Roasted Butternut Squash and Maple Dijon Vinaigrette

Salad Ingredients:

1 bunch of fresh spinach
1 medium butternut squash, roasted and cubed
1/2 small purple onion, diced small
1/2 honey crisp apple, diced small
1/2 cup white cheddar cheese, shredded
Walnuts

Maple Dijon Vinaigrette:

1/4 balsamic vinegar
1 tbsp Dijon mustard

3 Tbsp pure maple syrup
1/4 olive oil
Sea salt
Pepper

Roasted Squash How To:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. While oven is heating, cut butternut squash in half. Use a peeler to peel the skin from the squash. Scoop out innards of squash and throw away (or save seeds to roast later). Drizzle olive oil or coconut oil onto the inside flesh of the squash. Place squash flesh side down onto the baking sheet and bake for 45 minutes (give or take). You'll know it's done when you stick a fork into the flesh and it meets no resistance (see picture above for post-roast squash). Let squash cool while you make the vinaigrette.

Maple Dijon Vinaigrette How-To:

Place maple syrup, balsamic vinegar, mustard and dashes of the sea salt and pepper into a small bowl and whisk until combined. Slowly pour the olive oil into the bowl while whisking so that all ingredients combine. Taste and add additional seasoning to suit your taste buds.

Salad:

Once roasted squash is cool, cut into 1 inch thick horizontal strips leaving the ends for using in a soup or sauce for later. Cut the strips into cubes. Assemble all ingredients except walnuts into a bowl. Drizzle with vinaigrette and crumble walnuts on top before serving.

Enjoy!

*PS – You'll noticed the pictures don't include the purple onions. In my Sunday Funday mom-haze, I completely forgot to put them on the salad until AFTER I took the pictures. I took the hit.