

# Simple yogurt sauce can top it all

BY EMILY CODIK  
The Washington Post

The best way I’ve found to improve upon dinner has nothing to do with butter. It doesn’t involve a generous glug of cream, or even a few slabs of bacon. The secret recipe that has transformed so many of my meals from dull to exciting is so unassuming that you probably have it stashed in your refrigerator right now.

It’s yogurt. But it’s not the kind of yogurt you have for breakfast, topped with honey and fruit. I mean savory yogurt sauce, a no-frills combination of plain Greek yogurt (nonfat Fage brand is my favorite) with salt, lemon juice and a generous pour of extra-virgin olive oil. I serve it on just about everything.

This surprisingly simple sauce elevates the plainest of meals into something crave-worthy and healthful. It rescues me in the middle of the week,



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**A dollop of Lemon, Garlic and Herb Yogurt can elevate meats or veggies.**

when I get home late and all I’ve got in my pantry are beans and grains. I can’t count the number of times I’ve made dinner from basmati rice, a can of chickpeas and some yogurt. I’ve turned

yogurt into a pasta sauce, tossed simply with fettuccine and parsley. And it’s the only reason my daily grain bowls haven’t degraded into an endless parade of sad desk lunches.

I serve a thicker version, mixed with garlic, dill and walnuts, to accompany roast chicken or fish. That same sauce can add a cool touch to contrast beautifully with charred lamb or steak. (Sprinkle on Aleppo pepper or sumac for bonus points.) And the stripped-down recipe is a must in my favorite way to serve vegetables, which I learned from John Gregory-Smith’s terrific cookbook “Turkish Delights.”

I roast seasonal vegetables — acorn squash, cauliflower or even tomatoes — then arrange them on a platter dolloped with (you guessed it) yogurt sauce. The finishing touch? Chopped nuts, a hefty amount of herbs and, if I’m feeling ambitious, pomegranate seeds or crumbled feta.

That’s something I’d serve at a dinner party. But it’s also perfect for when the only person I want to treat is myself.

*This versatile condiment can be a dip, a spread, a topping for grain bowls and a sauce for grilled chicken and fish.*

**Lemon, Garlic and Herb Yogurt**  
*Makes 8 servings (about 2 cups total).*

**1¼ cups plain nonfat Greek-style yogurt, preferably Fage brand**  
**1 tablespoon finely chopped dill**  
**PLUS more for garnish**  
**1 garlic clove, minced**  
**Juice of ½ lemon**  
**1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil**  
**PLUS more for drizzling**  
**¼ teaspoon salt**  
**¼ cup finely chopped walnuts, for garnish**

Scoop the yogurt into a mixing bowl. Add 1 tablespoon dill, the garlic, lemon juice, 1 tablespoon oil and the salt, stirring until thoroughly incorporated.

Transfer to a serving dish; garnish with the walnuts, more dill and a drizzle of oil.

**Nutrients per ¼-cup serving:** 45 calories, 5 grams protein, 2 grams carbohydrate, 2 grams fat, no saturated fat, no cholesterol, 95 milligrams sodium, no dietary fiber, 2 grams sugar.

## Knives

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Home cooks, on the other hand, will rip a steak to shreds and completely annihilate a tomato because, well, all we’ve got is that old serrated steak knife we pulled from that equally old wooden block on the counter, the ones with blades that have long since dulled and likely have never seen a sharpener. With our sub-par daggers, we don’t cut food as much as we simply tear it apart, leaving rivers of juices from mashed fruit and vegetables and uneven slices of torn bread in our wakes.

In our defense, some of us don’t know what we don’t know. Fortunately, there are folks who are willing to teach us.

Martin Gravely is the senior program manager for the University of Richmond’s Center for Culinary Arts. Earlier this month, he held a knife-skills class that went over the basics, everything from a knife’s characteristics and its proper handling to honing and sharpening and, of course, slicing and dicing without chopping off a digit or two.

Ultimately, Gravely said, knives are tools. They should perform efficiently and make your time in the kitchen both productive and, well, fun. That means finding knives that work for you, rather than against you.

And that’s where it all comes down to personal preference, Gravely said, adding that he’s



### Knife handling techniques

**Grip the knife properly.** Place your thumb and side of your index finger on either side of the blade, at the heel, then curl the rest of your fingers around the handle. Do not rest your index finger along the top of the knife.

**Always cut away** from your body, in a forward “oval” motion, keeping the tip of the knife on the cutting surface as you use it. Also, be aware of your other hand, which many people use to guide the knife. Keep those fingers tucked under — keep your thumb behind them — and use your knuckles instead to guide the knife as you cut.

often asked for recommendations about specific brands. Forget brands — find a knife that fits comfortably in your hand, is easy to maintain and won’t break your budget. If the \$20 knife you bought at a local store fills the bill, don’t spend hundreds on something else just because of name recognition.

“There are plenty of knives out there in the low, middle and high (price) ranges that are all going to perform well for you and last a long time if you take

care of them,” Gravely said. “When you’re holding the knife properly and you have the motion down, it should become effortless, (where) you don’t even really feel the food under your blade.”

“If your knife delivers that for you, then don’t spend any more” for another knife, he added.

When shopping for knives, here’s a tip: Gravely said sets may seem like a good idea because they offer variety and,

usually, a lot of knives. However, most home cooks don’t need and won’t use all of the knives in a large set.

“Five (knives) will ... get you through just about anything you need to do in the kitchen,” he said, starting with a good chef’s knife (also called a French knife,) which typically takes care of 95 percent of the work in commercial kitchens. From there, he recommends having a boning knife, fillet/slicer knife, a serrated knife and a paring

knife, for specific tasks where a chef’s knife might be too large or cumbersome.

Most knives today are made from materials such as stainless steel, carbon or a blend of the two called high carbon. Each has its pros and cons (high carbon is considered the “sweet spot” because it has the best properties of stainless steel and carbon,) but it’s worth considering all of them before buying, Gravely said. Knives are also made from ceramic, but those are often very expensive, very fragile and not easy to maintain at home.

Maintenance is a big consideration, Gravely said. Caring for knives means washing them properly (probably not in the dishwasher) and maintaining edges and blades regularly. Consumers should buy knives that they can sharpen themselves with a stone, the most popular way to sharpen knives, or with electric or manual sharpeners. Sharpening only takes 5 or 10 minutes once or twice a year, he said, but can make your knives last for years.

“So much of cooking and kitchen work is about uniformity and knife work is certainly a good example of that,” he said, adding that evenly cut pieces not only look better, but it means everything cooks in the same time too. “With a little bit of skill and practice you can get nice uniform pieces that really make a difference in the final product.”

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### Bavarian Kohlrabi Soup

Makes about 1 gallon, or 12 to 16 servings.

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| 3 ounces butter                               | cabbage   |
| ½ cup all-purpose flour                       | ½ cup dry white wine  |
| 1 tablespoon canola oil                       | 3½ quarts chicken or vegetable stock                                    |
| 1 large onion, diced                          | Juice of ½ lemon, or to taste   |
| 1 red bell pepper, diced                      | 1 tablespoon paprika  |
| 3 carrots, diced                              | Salt AND pepper   |
| 3 celery ribs, diced                          | Sour cream, horseradish and additional paprika, as desired, for topping |
| 2 to 3 cups diced kohlrabi                    |   |
| 1 cup fresh green beans, cut in 1-inch pieces |   |
| 1 cup thinly sliced green                     |   |

In a small saucepan over low heat, melt butter and add flour, a little at a time, until a paste forms that is thick enough that it begins to “clean” the bottom of the pan and resembles thick, wet sand. Cook about 5 minutes, stirring regularly to form a smooth blond roux. Turn off heat and reserve.

In a 2-gallon pot, heat canola oil until it begins to smoke. Add onion, bell pepper, carrot, celery, kohlrabi, green beans and cabbage and cook until they are caramelized on their edges, about 3 to 4 minutes.

Add the wine and allow it to mostly evaporate while scraping the browned bits from the bottom of the pot. Add the stock and the reserved roux, stirring well to completely dissolve the roux. Stirring often as you go, bring the soup to a boil for 10 seconds to thicken and then return to low heat.

Finish with the lemon juice, paprika, salt and pepper to taste.

Serve garnished with sour cream, horseradish and paprika, as desired.

— Martin Gravely

### Classic Salsa

Makes 2 to 3 cups.

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|--|---|
| 5 Roma tomatoes                                | 1 to 2 garlic cloves, finely minced       |
| ¼ cup red onion, finely diced                  | Squeeze of fresh lemon or lime juice      |
| ¼ cup green pepper, finely diced               | Salt AND pepper, to taste                 |
| 2 to 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro      | Your favorite tortilla chips, for serving |
| 1 to 2 tablespoons jalapeño, very finely diced |   |

Quarter the Roma tomatoes, scoop out the seeds (reserving for another use, if desired) and dice the flesh. Put tomatoes into a large bowl and add red onion, green pepper, cilantro, jalapeño, garlic, lemon or lime juice and salt and pepper, to taste. Serve with chips.

— Martin Gravely

### Five essential knives for any kitchen

While there are many knives out there, here are five basic varieties that can be found in most kitchens.

A **chef’s knife** is an all-purpose knife used for most tasks in the kitchen, from chopping and mincing to dicing and slicing. They come in a variety of sizes, typically 6 to 12 inches, so choose the one that best suits you. These are sometimes called French knives. (Santoku knives are Japanese chef’s knives that tend to have shorter blades than Western styles. Many often have

granton edges, or indentations meant to keep food from sticking to the knife when cutting.)

**Serrated knives** are sharp with blades like a saw and come in a variety of lengths. Longer knives are ideal for cutting through foods with tough exteriors, such as loaves of bread or sausages. Smaller serrated knives can be used for fruits and vegetables.

**Boning knives** have blades with varying widths (some are curved) for removing

bones from a cut of meat, such as a ham or roast beef.

**Filet knives** have narrow blades that are used for filleting fish. Blades vary in size and can be somewhat flexible, to allow for clean cutting along the bones and the skin when separating from the flesh.

**Paring knives** are the smallest of the bunch, with blades that are usually about 3 or 4 inches long that taper to a point. They’re best for tasks such as peeling fruits and vegetables or removing eyes from potatoes.

### What’s in your knife?

Knives are either forged or stamped. Forged knives are those that are typically handmade or hand-hammered from one piece of metal. In general, they require more craftsmanship than stamped knives, which are stamped out of a large sheet of metal. For that reason, forged knives are typically more expensive, heavier and more well-balanced than stamped knives. However, some people prefer stamped knives’ weight and feel over forged knives.

Choosing a forged or stamped knife comes down to personal preference.

Additionally, most knives are made from stainless steel, carbon, a blend of the two called high carbon, or ceramic, though the latter tends to be the least popular option for home cooks and professionals alike. Here’s a glimpse at the strengths and weaknesses of each.

#### STAINLESS STEEL

**Pro:** Doesn’t react to acidic foods such as tomatoes or citrus fruits, which means the knife will not rust or become discolored. It’s easy to sharpen at home.

**Con:** It’s softer than other materials, and therefore doesn’t hold a sharp edge as long, which means more maintenance.

**CARBON**

**Pro:** Carbon knives are harder and therefore hold sharp edges longer than stainless steel, which means less maintenance.

**Con:** Prone to rust and discoloration.

**HIGH CARBON**

**Pro:** The “sweet spot” because it blends the best characteristics of stainless steel (nonreactive to acidic foods) with carbon (holds sharp edges well) and overall is easy to sharpen.

**Con:** None

**CERAMIC**

**Pro:** None

**Con:** Ceramic knives are often expensive, fragile and difficult for home cooks to maintain.

### Knife basics

Much about knives comes down to personal preference, from the size and functionality to the cost. But there are universal tips for choosing, using and caring for knives that apply to all of them, no matter the brand or specific characteristics.

**When purchasing,** hold the knives if possible and practice cutting with them to get a feel for the handles, blade lengths and weights. Only buy knives that feel comfortable in your hand. Knives that are too heavy or bulky are not only uncomfortable, but they could lead to injuries if not handled properly. And remember, cost isn’t necessarily an indicator of quality.

**Sets may include** more knives than you need. Think about how often you’re cooking, and start by selecting five knives (one of each — chef’s, serrated, boning, fillet and paring) that are reasonably good quality, within your price range, and easy to maintain at home. You can always add more later.

**Keep your eyes** on the knife at all times.

**Always use cutting boards.** Use large boards that provide enough surface area to work and push foods aside without having to clean off the board before moving on to something else. Wood and plastic are the best materials to use to reduce wear and tear on your knife blades. Never use glass, marble or metal surfaces as cutting boards.

**Additionally, cutting boards** should be secured to the counter surface so they don’t move while you’re chopping food. If it doesn’t already have rubber grips on the bottom, place the board on top of a wet dish towel, moistened paper towels or shelf liner. Also, position the board at the edge of the counter or surface to make it easier to push the chopped food into a pot or pan.

**No bulldozing!** Never use your knife *blade-side* down to scrape food across a cutting board. Turn the knife over, so that the top of the knife — the *spine* — is on the bottom, and push food with that side instead.

**Most knives benefit** from hand-washing with soap and water. Dishwashers’ heat and cleansers can damage blades and wooden handles. Store knives away from other utensils that might damage them.

**Never reach** for a falling knife. Resist the urge to try to catch it.