The bright days of spring and early summer are the true "salad days" of the year. We have not to seek long to find materials to fill our bowl, for at this period kindly Nature provides in such abundance and variety, in field and wood, that even if the garden crops have disappointed our expectations the salad-bowl may still grace our table. It is strange in these days, when botany is a subject for study in Board-schools, to find that the ideas which most people hold with regard to salads are restricted to lettuces—cabbage or cos—and not even the familiar watercress enters into their limited range, while the hundred-and-one other plants and herbs, which are just as edible and wholesome as the ordinary lettuce, are apparently unknown.

Still more strange—even barbarous—is it to find people who cling to that greatest of abominations, the combination of sugar and vinegar as a dressing; or, what is even more abominable, the ready-made "cream" dressing which adorns the grocer's shelves. It is no wonder that the salad-bowl fails to be popular in our country as long as it is maligned in this manner.

Let us first understand what are the essentials of a good salad; then we will take a look at some of the best of choice salads for our use; and, lastly, but not least, pay attention to the dressing for our bowl and the contents—or what should be the contents—of our crust.

**Praima faizel**, a salad must be dry. It may be composed of the choicest collection of plants and herbs, but its moisture drains from the leaves and bowl in the least, though every other attention has been given.

When possible to do without washing the leaves it is better to do so, using a clean, dry cloth to wipe them; when too gritty or soiled for this, break every leaf off separately, dash each one in water and dry thoroughly, then hang the basket which holds them in a current of air for a time. Avoid cutting salads with a steel knife. Break the leaves lightly with the fingers, and never "dress" a salad until the very last moment; it is better to do it at the table, if possible. Again, be very sparing in the use of vinegar; a very small proportion is sufficient, but it so happens that having either an insufficient supply of oil, or having an oil of inferior quality, perhaps even rancid in flavour, is thought that by doubling the dose of vinegar all these defects may be covered. There can no greater mistake be made. Of oil itself we shall have more to say later on; suffice it to say here that its place can never be taken by any substitute, and that the digestibility and wholesomeness of salads depend chiefly on this ingredient. Another essential point to bear in mind is that every thing that is used for a salad—plant, herb, or vegetable—must be young and tender, in season, and very fresh, "morning gathered" whenever possible.

Also, vegetables of all kinds lose much of their flavour if allowed to lie in the water for more than an hour; and more than once have lost their crispness. It may be partially recovered by letting them lie for a short time in ice-cold water; but when perfectly fresh, rinse them through it as quickly as possible.

"In short"—to borrow Mr. Micawber's favourite expression—a salad well prepared is a charming compound; but if carelessly and badly put together it is an abomination. Now let us consider what are the legitimate and available means which we have for supplying our salad-bowl.

Naturally lettuces take the first place, and there is a very considerable variety of these if we care to cultivate them. The "cabbage" variety, Malta or Drumhead, Tom Thumb, and all good "hearing" lettuces make the best salads. Cos lettuce, unless very young, is too tough. Perhaps what is known in France as "petite laitue" makes the nicest salad of all. Gathered when only an inch or two high, at the time of transplanting, it is tender, succulent, and refreshing.

Next to lettuce we may rank watercress, now so largely cultivated. It is an agreeable change to make use of this as a salad; and there are few green things which contain more medicinal properties. Owing to the nature of its growth, watercress requires scrupulous cleansing in several waters, then break the stems lightly, excluding all thick and tough parts.

Dandelion is by no means so common with us as it is in France, where it is now cultivated, sown, or planted, and as soon as the tender leaves show through the ground they are covered over to the depth of two or more inches with more soil. Through this they grow, producing long leaves, bleached white, and as tender as could be desired. The slight bitterness is most pleasant to taste. Chicory of two kinds, the "barbe," which has long, fine strands, and the short, thick variety are both natives of southern France and Algeria, but like many another product of those climes, they are familiar to the customers of our best shops.

Endive is well-known as one of our best winter salads; by spring-time it has disappeared from our ken.

Sorrel, with its slight acidity, is rather to be regarded as an adjunct of the salad-bowl.
than as a staple ingredient, but a few of the youngest and tenderest leaves are a great improvement always.

Celery, which is so important to a chicken salad, is sometimes of the poorest when it is most wanted; its place may be excellently well-filled by shredding the fine white heart of young cabbage, and sprinkling with celery. Very few people would detect the subterfuge.

Many cold-bellied vegetables make most excellent salads, and in warm weather quite a substantial addition may be made to our bills of fare by this means.

French beans, boiled, well-drained, with the addition of some finely-chopped parsley and chives, make the vegetable salad par excellence; but closely rivalling this come cold kidney boiled, white haricot beans, field peas, asparagus, cauliflower, and artichokes—even cold potatoes sliced. Parsley is a great addition to all these.

Foremost amongst salad herbs we must place mustard and cress. These two, which are generally sown together, are both of such recognised excellence that even the ships which take long voyages, they are grown in boxes to keep a succession for the supply of the table throughout the journey. There is another variety of garden cress which has short thick wavy leaves, it is aromatic and pungent, really an American variety.

Radish tops, if quite young, give a pleasantly sharp flavour, and the smallest scarlet radishes are a very good addition to the bowl. A variety of beetroot known as "la Carde" which has small root and large leaves, furnishes another salad material, the leaves being used as are lettuce leaves. The ordinary beetroot boiled and cut in slices is much liked either grated or mixing with other ingredients. The leaves of the beet (a wild plant on dry calcareous soil, but which is occasionally grown in the garden), are sometimes added to the list of the smaller salad herbs. When bruised they smell like cucumbers.

A sprig of tarragon is considered a "zine quid not in" a true French salad, and this plant deserves to be known.

Chives, too, are far more delicate in flavour than any species of onion, therefore far more suitable for using in this way. Shallots rank next to chives in supplying the needful component of onion. Mint, chervil, parsley, thyme, the savoys, basil and rape, are all more or less indispensable where the true art of flavouring is attempted.

"Nettles, and the twigs of rosemary formed delicious salads for our forefathers," says a great culinary authority, "and they ate leeks well seasoned with salt, and honey: horseradish, mint and parsley, with salt and oil; lettuce, fennel, mint, chervil, parsley and elderflowers all mixed together, and to these they sometimes added pickled gherkins." Truly, a combination of ingredients more varied than elegant, one would think.

The following is the recipe of an old-English spring salad of 1682.

There is a sort of salad commonly gathered in the spring, consisting of young wild yews and sprouts, both of trees and herbs, the which, being gathered discreetly, with nothing but a pocket-knife, by very young and tender, and so that no one thing exceed the other, but that there may be a fine agreement in their relishing, so it will be very acceptable to many. Violets, small sprouts of burnet, young leaves of primroses, and flowers, mints, sorrel, buds of gorseberries, roses, barberries, flowers of barley, borage, etc., are exchanged. Truly a most poetic salad, and one requiring "Attic" salt for the seasoning thereof.

It may be argued that many of these herbs and plants are not to be found in our shops and markets, or if found there they are often too limp and stale, yet withal so expensive, that they are practically worthless. This is true. In London lately I was inspired at a large green grocer's for some tarragon, and was offered one half-withered sprig for threepence.

Where anyone has a plot of garden-ground, he can raise his own "attic chief square," it is well worth their while to invest in two or three pennworth of mixed herb-seed from a herb-alist's. Chives must be bought in the root; tarragon in the leaf; horseradish in the head, and even the dandelion, are all so homely, hardly things they will flourish almost anywhere, even in a "London back-yard, therefore there is no need for us to be deprived of these. Watercress we have in abundance all the year round, and those who are able to make excursions into country fields and lanes will find most of the other things which have been mentioned growing wild in field and hedgerow. So much, then, for our salad-bowl.

Now let us turn to the all-important "dressing," and study the contents of our cruet-stand.

First in importance we must place oil. Although there are various kinds of salad-oil, there is none so wholesome and really reliable as pure olive-oil. It is not tasteless, having both the flavour and aroma of the olive from which it is drawn; but once one has become accustomed to this no other kind will be used. In sunny Lanegeois groves of olive-trees are as abundant as firs and lofty-hedges in our northern climes, and the oil which the fruit yields is used for a great variety of purposes. It replaces butter very often; it is the fat, par excellence, for sauces, and it enters into the composition of many dishes where we should use snet or lard.

It is quite an unaccountable prejudice which so many people appear to have to the use of oil. Really, it is the purest form of fat which we can have, and therefore of necessity the most wholesome. Much of our cooking is done too much the fatless way and easy digestibility make it an invaluable aid in cases of sickness, notably in consumption. Wherever cod-liver oil has been prescribed, its place may be taken by olive-oil with equal benefit and without the nauseous sensation which deter so many from following their prescription. Strings of pearls will not cease to sparkle in oil have little to distinguish them from toast and butter, and quite a large dose may be pleasently administered in this way. Light biscuits, to serve hot, mixed with oil, flour, salt, and mixed with oil, then baked crisp and brown, are delicious for serving with an invalid's cup of milk. When using oil for frying fritters, potatoes, vegetables, etc., always allow it to boil a moment or two before putting anything into it, or it is apt to break and turn very much. Keep oil in a cool, dry place; damp and warmth will cause it to become rancid, and then it is fit for nothing whatever. Keep the bottle in your larder if you can to keep it clean; one drop of stale oil will spoil all the rest.

A clear, light-coloured vinegar is the best for salad-dressings. Do not use vinegar from bought pickles; there is generally some other acid, as well as ginger and other ingredients, in that, detrimental to a salad. Above all, be sparing in your use of it altogether; remember it was the "navier" who had to contribute this portion in the old Spanish proverbial salad-dressing. A little made mustard is always an improvement in a dressing, and so also is a fine scraping of horse-radish; pepper and salt should be sprinkled over the salad dry; sauces, etc., are no great addition, but an egg, hard-boiled and cut small, is a decided gain.

Lastly use a wooden or tortoise-shell spoon and for to toss the whole together, and perform this operation with all the grace, skill, and dexterity, of which you are capable.

The practical directions for a salad-dressing committee, by that wise and accomplished Sydney Smith, are well worthy of repetition, although to a few they may be trite and stale.

For the dressing:

"Two boiled potatoes, strained through a kitchen sieve.
Softness and smoothness to the salad give; Of mustard mustards take a single spoon.
Dissolutive the condiment that lies too soon; Yet deem it not, thou man of haste, a fault
To add a double quantity of salt.
Four times the spoon with oil of Lucca crown,
And twice with vinegar procured from town;
True taste requires it, and your poet begs
The powdered yellow of two hard-boiled eggs.
Let onion's atoms lurk within the bowl,
And, scarce suspected, animate the whole;
And lastly, in the favoured compound toss
A magic spoonful of anchovy sauce.
Grapefruit and glorious! Oh, herbaceous meat!
"I would tempt the dying anchorite to eat,
Back to the world he'd turn his weary soul,
And mingle his fingers in the salad-bowl."

Chaptal, a French chemist, gives us what we may call a valuable "wrinkle" on salad-dressing.

"The dressing of the salad should be saturated with oil, and seasoned with salt and pepper before the vinegar is added. It results from this process that there never can be too much vinegar, for, from the specific gravity of vinegar compared with oil, what is more than useful will fall to the bottom of the bowl. The salt should not dissolve in the vinegar, but in the oil, by which means it is more easily distributed through the salad."

Enough has been said to show that the salad-bowl is worthy of being more liberally patronised with us than it is at present; but one other word must be said, as it is apt to escape with all other dishes of vegetables may be mentioned in its favour, namely, economy, for a joint accompanied by a salad will not be too severely attacked as it would be without it, and an unattractive one is often made acceptable by its simple aid.