

Early Spring Fava Bean, Pea Tendril & Toasted Walnut Salad

Tracey remembers enjoying a salad of favas, walnuts, cheese, and walnut oil early in her career. Tasting how those simple ingredients worked together changed something deeply about the way she cooks. This salad is her homage to that dish, which she looks forward to eating every spring.

Favas are like spring itself: short and sweet. Their season can sometimes be only a few weeks long, so if you see them at your farmers' market, snap them up and set aside a little time to prepare them. For a salad like this, you want small, early-harvest beans, not the bigger, starchier ones that show up later in the season. The work of first stripping them from their pods and then blanching and shocking them before popping each bean out of its thick skin can be slow going, but it's the world's tastiest form of spring cleaning.

SERVES 4

3 3/4 lb fava beans in the pod

Kosher salt

2 cups walnut halves

2 tablespoons walnut oil

Zest of 2 lemons, removed in strips with a channel knife and chopped

1 teaspoon honey

3 oz Nicasio Reserve cheese or an aged sheep's milk cheese, shaved

4 cups loosely packed pea tendrils

Sel gris, for finishing

To prepare the fava beans: Shuck the fava beans from their pods. In a large pot, combine 3 qt water and 1/2 cup kosher salt and bring to a boil over high heat. Fill a medium bowl with water and ice. Add the beans to the boiling water and cook for about 1 minute, until tender. The timing will depend on their size. Drain immediately and plunge the beans into the ice bath to halt the cooking. As soon as the beans are cold, remove from the ice water and spread on a paper towel to dry. The beans can be prepared up to this point up to a day in advance and stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

To slip each fava from its skin, gently apply pressure and pinch the fatter end of the bean, being careful not to squish the bean. Place the skinned favas in a medium bowl and set aside. You should have about 1 lb (3 cups) skinned favas.

To toast the walnuts: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Spread the walnuts in a single layer on a sheet pan and toast for 8 minutes, until golden. Pour onto a work surface and let cool. Using the palm of your hand, gently press the walnuts to break them up.

To serve: Add the walnuts, walnut oil, lemon zest, honey, cheese, and 1 teaspoon kosher salt to the fava beans and toss to coat the favas evenly. Place the pea tendrils on a serving plate and top with the fava salad. Sprinkle with the sel gris.