

TO VEGETABLES
with love

Charred broccoli with quinoa and halva

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Savoury and sweet bring harmony to salads and particularly when *brassica oleracea* are concerned. This family of vegetables – colloquially known as brassicas, which encompass broccoli, kale, cauliflower, gai larn, bok choy, cabbage, turnips, brussels sprouts etc – tend to have a slight earthy bitterness which responds enthusiastically to a hint of sweetness.

The genius of this salad – and you will agree with me once you taste it – belongs not to me, but to British chef and cookbook author Gill Meller. Gill’s most recent book [Outside](#), dedicated to the joys of cooking and eating outdoors, offers a kale with halva and raisins salad that is a symphony of earth and sweet. It’s a recipe that I noticed during my first flick through of the book but I hadn’t tried it until last week, when I saw my friend Kris Warman, who writes the excellent cookbook review blog [Shipshape Eatworthy](#), post about it on Instagram.

Gill writes “I find kale irresistible, but occasionally it likes something sweet to carry it over the finish line. That where the halva comes in – and what a win, what a win!”

What a win! A huge, massive, shutout victory. When I took my first mouthful, I was immediately reminded of another salad, one from my archives! Gill’s recipe was evocative of one from my first book *Community* – sweet sesame broccoli with edamame and quinoa, a personal favourite of mine which I think often took a backseat to all the other smash hit broccoli salads in that book. That particular recipe features blanched broccoli, edamame and quinoa tossed with a maple-laced tahini sauce – it’s savoury, with an emphatic sweet edge. In the book, I describe it as a mashup of Asian and middle eastern flavours.

So, this salad is a mash up of a mash up. I’ve taken the key elements and textures of my *Community* broccoli salad and remixed it with Gill’s brilliant trick of adding halva for sweetness. I have made a few changes to the original recipe – the broccoli is charred rather than blanched, which adds smoky complexity, and I’ve replaced the edamame with salad leaves. I’ve also reduced the sweetness of the original dressing, to make room for the halva.

A note about halva – rich and nutty halva is made from combining ground sesame seeds (tahini) with sugar. It is fudge-like, with a crumbly texture. Often, halva is flavoured with rosewater, chocolate, peanut butter, cardamom, pistachios, caramel etc. If you’re unsure, opt for a plain halva for this salad. During testing, I actually used a nougat flavoured halva and then a peanut butter one. Both worked beautifully.

Serves 4

2 cups vegetable stock or water
200g (1 cup) quinoa
extra virgin olive oil
2 small heads (560g / 1.25pounds) broccoli, cut into florets
2-3 handfuls salad leaves such as baby spinach, baby arugula/rocket
2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds (white, black or a combination)
60g (2 ounces) halva, crumbled

Sesame dressing

2 tablespoons tahini
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 clove garlic, grated
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
1 tablespoon sesame oil

Pour the vegetable stock or water into a medium pot and bring to the boil. Add the quinoa and once it comes back to the boil, cover, reduce heat to medium and cook for 10-12 minutes until all the liquid has been absorbed. Turn off the heat and let it stand for 10 minutes - it will fluff up and dry out. Uncover and transfer to a large salad bowl or platter and allow to cool while you prepare the rest of the salad.

Meanwhile, heat a large grill or frying pan on medium high. Add 1-2 tablespoons of olive oil and the broccoli florets, working in batches if needed (avoid overcrowding the pan), and cook undisturbed until charred on bottom, about 2 -3 minutes. Toss and continue cooking until the broccoli is charred in spots, just tender but still very green, another 2-3 minutes. Remove from heat and continue cooking the remaining broccoli, if needed.

In a bowl, add the tahini, soy sauce or tamari, garlic, rice vinegar and sesame oil. Whisk until smooth. Add 1 tablespoon of water and whisk again. The consistency should be pourable. If it is too thick, whisk in a little more water.

To quinoa, add the salad leaves, broccoli and dressing. Toss to combine. Top with sesame seeds and halva and serve.