

Smashed Cucumber Salad

2 cucumbers
2 cloves garlic, smashed and minced
1 tbsp sambal or sriracha
Juice of 2 limes
Salt
MSG (optional, but not really)



Two fun things about this recipe: 1) you get to smash stuff! And 2) MSG. Now, MSG has a bit of a bad reputation. This started back in the 1940s with the increasing popularity of Chinese restaurants. People began reporting headaches, dizziness, and a whole host of super fun symptoms. It was believed that MSG was causing people to get ill. Thankfully, there is a lot of modern research to suggest that not only is MSG not harmful, but it's also actually beneficial. It is, after all, an amino acid. There's research to suggest it aids digestion, increases saliva production, and contributes to the rebuilding of muscles. So why do so many people say it makes them sick? Well, look at what it's usually on; fatty, spicy, fried food that is super bad for us and really delicious, so we eat too much of it. It's a simple case of correlation, not causation. That being said, you can skip the MSG if you'd like. Personally, I love it, and find a bit of judicious sprinkling can improve a fair number of dishes. Glutamic acid is naturally present in a variety of foods, and as monosodium glutamate is a glutamic acid molecule with one sodium molecule attached, I have no problem using it, with respect and moderation of course, in my cooking.

Cut the end of the cucumbers. Put them in a plastic bag. Using a meat tenderizer, the end of a large jar, or the heel of your hand, squish the cucumbers until they're cracked open and flattened. Take them out of the bag and cut the cucumbers in fork-friendly sizes.

Toss the cucumbers in the remaining ingredients and let marinate in the coldest part of your fridge for at least 4 hours and up to 3 days. The cucumbers will lose their color somewhat, but the marinade will get better.

If you skip the MSG, you could use mushroom powder or crumbled seaweed to get the savory, tasty, umami flavor. In fact, commercial MSG is often made from fermented and purified seaweed. Fun fact: did you know "umami" means "essence of deliciousness"? You can find MSG powder in Asian supermarkets. You can also find dried mushrooms and seaweed there to make your own powders.