

- Prep Time: 15 minutes
- Cook Time: 10 minutes (for the bacon)
- Total Time: 25 minutes
- Difficulty Intensity: Easy / Beginner Level
- Flavor Profile: Creamy, savory, smoky, and refreshing
- Serving Size: 6 generous side portions

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## What Makes This Salad “Addictive”?

The secret behind the “crack salad” phenomenon is the irresistible combination of high-contrast textures and bold, comforting flavors. You get:

1. The Ultimate Crunch: English cucumbers provide a fresh, water-rich base that stays crisp even after being tossed in dressing.
2. Smoky, Savory Goodness: Real, double-smoked crisp bacon adds rich bite and saltiness.
3. Sharp & Tangy Cheeses: Shredded sharp cheddar balances the creaminess, while a hint of parmesan locks in savory depth.
4. Rich Herb Ranch Dressing: A blend of sour cream, real mayonnaise, fresh dill, garlic, and onion powder coats every slice without making it soggy.

## Kitchen Tools Needed

To prepare this dish smoothly, gather the following basic kitchen tools before getting started:

- Large mixing bowl
- Chef’s knife and cutting board

- Skillet or oven tray (for cooking bacon)
- Paper towels (for draining bacon grease)
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Rubber spatula or salad tongs
- Whisk

## Ingredients

### For the Salad Base

- 4 English Cucumbers (sliced into 1/4-inch rounds or half-moons)
- 8 strips Thick-Cut Bacon (cooked until extra crispy and chopped)
- 1 cup Sharp Cheddar Cheese (freshly shredded for best texture)
- 1/2 cup Green Onions (thinly sliced, both white and green parts)
- 1/4 cup Fresh Dill (finely chopped)

## For the Creamy Ranch Dressing

- 1/2 cup Sour Cream (full-fat recommended for maximum creaminess)
- 1/3 cup Mayonnaise
- 1 packet (1 oz) Dry Ranch Seasoning Mix (*or 2 tbsp homemade ranch blend*)
- 1 tbsp Fresh Lemon Juice (or white vinegar for tang)
- 1/2 tsp Garlic Powder
- 1/2 tsp Cracked Black Pepper
- Salt to taste (*Note: Bacon and ranch mix are already salty, so taste before adding extra salt!*)

## Step-by-Step Instructions

### Step 1: Prep the Cucumbers

1. Wash your English cucumbers thoroughly under cold running water. Pat them completely dry with a paper towel.
2. Trim off the ends. Slice the cucumbers into 1/4-inch rounds. If you prefer smaller bite-

sized pieces, cut the rounds in half to create half-moons.

3. Pro-Tip for Maximum Crispness: If you prefer an extra-dry salad, place the sliced cucumbers in a colander, toss with 1/2 teaspoon of salt, and let them drain for 10 minutes. Pat dry with paper towels before assembling.

## **Step 2: Cook the Bacon**

1. Place the bacon strips in a cold skillet over medium heat.
2. Cook for 8 to 10 minutes, flipping occasionally, until the bacon is deep golden brown and very crispy.
3. Transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate to drain excess fat. Once cooled, chop or crumble into bite-sized bits.

## **Step 3: Whisk the Dressing**

1. In a medium bowl, combine the sour cream, mayonnaise, dry ranch seasoning mix, lemon juice, garlic powder, and cracked black pepper.
2. Whisk vigorously until smooth and completely blended.

## **Step 4: Assemble & Toss**

1. In a large salad or mixing bowl, add the sliced cucumbers, chopped crisp bacon, shredded cheddar cheese, sliced green onions, and fresh chopped dill.
2. Pour the creamy ranch dressing over the top.
3. Using a soft spatula or salad tongs, gently fold the ingredients together until every cucumber slice is evenly coated in dressing, cheese, and bacon.

## **Step 5: Chill & Serve**

1. While you can serve this salad immediately, chilling it in the refrigerator for 20 to 30 minutes allows the flavors to meld together beautifully.
2. Give it a gentle toss right before serving, garnish with an extra sprinkle of bacon and green onions, and enjoy!

## **Expert Tips for Success**

- Use English or Persian Cucumbers: Standard American cucumbers have thick, waxy skins and large, watery seed pockets that can dilute your dressing. English (hothouse) or Persian cucumbers have thin skins and minimal seeds, ensuring a far superior crunch.

- **Grate Your Own Cheese:** Pre-shredded bagged cheese is coated in anti-caking starches that alter the texture of creamy dressings. Grating a block of sharp cheddar fresh off the block takes 60 seconds and makes a noticeable difference.
- **Don't Skip the Fresh Dill:** Even though dry ranch mix contains herbs, adding fresh chopped dill elevates the overall flavor profile from basic side dish to high-end deli quality.

## Variations & Substitutions

- **Protein Boost:** Turn this side dish into a complete meal by adding 2 cups of shredded rotisserie chicken or grilled diced chicken breast.
- **Light & Healthy:** Swap the sour cream for plain Greek yogurt and use light mayo to reduce overall calories and increase protein.
- **Spice It Up:** Add a diced jalapeño or a pinch of red pepper flakes into the dressing for a spicy kick.
- **Vegetarian Option:** Omit the bacon and add toasted sunflower seeds or smoked pepitas for that essential smoky crunch.

## Storage & Make-Ahead Guidelines

- **Storage:** Store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 days. Cucumbers naturally release water over time, so give the salad a brief stir before

eating.

- **Make-Ahead Strategy:** If prepping a day in advance for a party, keep the cucumbers, shredded cheese, crispy bacon, and dressing in separate containers in the fridge. Combine and toss them 30 minutes before serving for maximum crispness.
- **Freezing:** Do not freeze this salad. Dairy-based dressings and fresh cucumbers do not thaw well.

## Nutritional Information

*Calculated per serving (based on 6 standard side servings).*

| Nutrients            | Amount Per Serving |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Calories             | 245 kcal           |
| Total Fat            | 21 g               |
| <i>Saturated Fat</i> | <i>7 g</i>         |
| <i>Trans Fat</i>     | <i>0 g</i>         |
| Cholesterol          | 35 mg              |
| Sodium               | 580 mg             |
| Total Carbohydrates  | 6 g                |
| <i>Dietary Fiber</i> | <i>1 g</i>         |
| <i>Sugars</i>        | <i>3 g</i>         |
| Protein              | 8 g                |
| Vitamin D            | 0.2 mcg            |
| Calcium              | 160 mg             |
| Iron                 | 0.6 mg             |
| Potassium            | 240 mg             |