

- Prep Time: 15 minutes
- Cook Time: 5 minutes (for nuts)
- Total Time: 20 minutes
- Difficulty Level: Easy / Beginner
- Intensity Rating: Low (Minimal thermal work, basic knife skills required)
- Yield: 4 generous starter portions or 2 main course salads

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Ingredients

For the Salad Base

- Honeycrisp Apples: 2 medium apples, cored and thinly sliced into half-moons
- Fresh Baby Arugula & Baby Spinach Mix: 5 cups (packed)
- Feta Cheese: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (approx. 4 oz / 115g), freshly crumbled from a block
- Pecans: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup raw pecan halves
- Dried Cranberries: $\frac{1}{3}$ cup tart dried cranberries
- Red Onion: $\frac{1}{4}$ small red onion, paper-thinly sliced (optional, for subtle bite)

For the Maple-Dior Dressing

- Extra Virgin Olive Oil: $\frac{1}{4}$ cup high-quality oil
- Pure Maple Syrup: 2 tablespoons
- Apple Cider Vinegar: 1.5 tablespoons
- Dijon Mustard: 1 teaspoon

- Garlic: 1 small clove, finely grated or minced
- Fine Sea Salt: $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon
- Freshly Cracked Black Pepper: $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Toast the Pecans (Intensity: Medium)

Place a small dry skillet or frying pan over medium heat. Add the raw pecan halves in a single layer. Toast for 3 to 5 minutes, shaking the pan frequently to prevent burning. As soon as the nuts become fragrant and warm brown, immediately transfer them out of the skillet onto a cutting board to cool. Once cooled slightly, roughly chop them.

Step 2: Prepare the Dressing (Intensity: Low)

In a small glass jar or bowl, combine the extra virgin olive oil, pure maple syrup, apple cider vinegar, Dijon mustard, grated garlic, sea salt, and black pepper. Secure the lid on the jar and shake vigorously for 15 seconds (or whisk thoroughly in a bowl) until the emulsion is smooth, fully integrated, and slightly thickened.

Step 3: Slice the Apples (Intensity: Low)

Wash and dry the Honeycrisp apples. Keep the skin on for vibrant color and added fiber. Cut the apples into thin half-moon slices. *Culinary Tip:* If you are preparing this salad ahead of time, toss the sliced apples in 1 tablespoon of fresh lemon juice or cold water mixed with a pinch of salt to prevent oxidation.

Step 4: Assemble the Salad (Intensity: Low)

In a large, wide wooden bowl or salad platter, layer the ingredients for maximum visual appeal:

1. Spread the mixed greens (arugula and spinach) evenly across the base.
2. Scatter the paper-thin red onion slices over the greens.
3. Fan out the thin Honeycrisp apple slices across the top.
4. Evenly sprinkle the crumbled feta cheese, toasted chopped pecans, and dried cranberries over the entire surface.

Step 5: Dress and Serve (Intensity: Low)

Drizzle half of the prepared Maple-Dior dressing evenly over the assembled salad right before serving. Toss gently using salad tongs or server spoons, being careful not to bruise the delicate greens or break up the apple slices. Pass the remaining dressing on the side for guests who prefer extra flavor.

Pro Tips for Preparation & Storage

- **Make-Ahead Strategy:** The dressing can be made up to 5 days in advance and stored in an airtight glass container in the refrigerator. Re-shake vigorously before using as the oil will separate when chilled.
- **Cheese Variations:** If feta is too tangy for your preference, creamy goat cheese (chèvre)

or aged shaved Gorgonzola make excellent substitutes.

- **Storage Limits:** Once dressed, consume the salad within 2 to 3 hours for optimal crispness. Undressed salad base (excluding apples) can be kept in an airtight container with a paper towel for up to 2 days.

Comprehensive Nutritional Information

Below is the estimated nutritional breakdown per serving (based on 4 equal starter portions including dressing).

Metric	Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value*
Calories	310 kcal	—
Total Fat	21 g	27%
Saturated Fat	5 g	25%
Trans Fat	0 g	—
Cholesterol	15 mg	5%
Sodium	310 mg	13%
Total Carbohydrates	28 g	10%
Dietary Fiber	4 g	14%
Total Sugars	21 g	—
<i>Includes Added Sugars</i>	<i>6 g</i>	<i>12%</i>
Protein	5 g	10%
Vitamin D	0.2 mcg	1%
Calcium	120 mg	9%
Iron	1.2 mg	7%
Potassium	280 mg	6%