Prep Time	15 minutes
Chill Time	2 hours (minimum)
Total Time	2 hours 15 minutes
Skill Level	Very Easy (Intensity: Low)
Servings	8–10 side servings
Cuisine	American / Potluck Classic
Method	No-bake, chilled

Intensity Key: *Low* = simple stirring and measuring; *Moderate* = attention needed at the stovetop; *High* = rapid or delicate work. This recipe is Low intensity start to finish — there is no cooking and no heat.

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Ingredients

For the Fluff Base

- 1 can (20 oz / 567 g) crushed pineapple in 100% juice, well drained (reserve ¼ cup juice)
- 1 box (3.4 oz / 96 g) instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 cup (240 ml) cold milk (whole or 2% for best texture)
- 1 cup (240 g) plain Greek yogurt or sour cream (Greek yogurt adds tang with less richness)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp fresh lemon juice (brightens the flavor and keeps it from tasting flat)

For the Fruit

- 2 cans (11 oz / 312 g each) mandarin oranges in juice or light syrup, well drained
- 1 cup (120 g) mini marshmallows
- ½ cup (60 g) sweetened shredded coconut (optional)

- ½ cup (60 g) chopped pecans or walnuts (optional, for crunch)

For the Topping

- 1 tub (8 oz / 226 g) frozen whipped topping (Cool Whip-style), thawed
- Extra mandarin orange segments and a sprinkle of coconut, for garnish

Equipment

- Large mixing bowl
- Whisk
- Rubber spatula
- Colander
- Serving bowl (2-quart / 2-liter)
- Plastic wrap

Instructions

Step 1: Drain the Fruit Thoroughly — *Time: 10 minutes* | *Intensity: Low*

This is the most important step in the entire recipe. Empty the crushed pineapple into a fine-mesh colander set over a bowl and press firmly with the back of a spoon to squeeze out excess juice — reserve ¼ cup of the juice for the next step. Drain the mandarin oranges in a separate colander and gently pat the segments dry with paper towels.

Why it matters: Watery fruit is the number-one cause of soupy fluff salad. Every bit of liquid you remove now is a bit of creaminess you keep later.

Step 2: Whisk the Pudding Base — *Time: 3 minutes* | *Intensity: Low*

In your large mixing bowl, whisk together the instant vanilla pudding mix and the cold milk for about 2 minutes, until it begins to thicken. Add the reserved ¼ cup pineapple juice and whisk again — this infuses the base with pineapple flavor without adding extra sugar.

Tip: Use cold milk straight from the fridge. Warm milk keeps the pudding thin and the finished salad looser.

Step 3: Stir In the Yogurt and Flavorings — *Time: 2 minutes* | *Intensity: Low*

Whisk in the Greek yogurt (or sour cream), vanilla extract, and lemon juice until completely smooth. The mixture should be thick, glossy, and hold a soft ribbon when you lift the whisk.

Step 4: Fold In the Whipped Topping — *Time: 3 minutes* | *Intensity: Low*

Using a rubber spatula, gently fold the thawed whipped topping into the pudding mixture in three additions. Fold, don't stir — slide the spatula down the side of the bowl, across the bottom, and up over the top, turning the bowl a quarter-turn each time. Stop as soon as no white streaks remain. Overmixing deflates the whipped topping and makes the salad dense instead of fluffy.

Step 5: Add the Fruit and Mix-Ins — *Time: 3 minutes* | *Intensity: Low*

Gently fold in the drained crushed pineapple, then the mandarin orange segments, mini marshmallows, and coconut (if using). Add the chopped nuts last, reserving a tablespoon or two for garnish if you like. Fold just until evenly distributed — the oranges will break apart if you're too vigorous.

Step 6: Chill — *Time: 2 hours minimum | Intensity: Low*

Scrape the mixture into your serving bowl, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or up to 24 hours. This gives the pudding time to set, the marshmallows time to soften slightly, and the flavors time to marry. Overnight is even better.

Intensity note: There is nothing to watch here — just patience. Don't skip the chill; warm fluff salad is a runny fluff salad.

Step 7: Garnish and Serve — *Time: 2 minutes | Intensity: Low*

Just before serving, arrange a few extra mandarin segments on top and scatter with coconut and reserved nuts. Scoop into bowls or serve straight from the dish with a large spoon.

Tips for Success

- Drain, drain, drain. Press the pineapple, pat the oranges, and let both sit in the colander while you whisk the base.
- Cold milk, thawed topping. Both matter for texture.
- Fold, never beat. The spatula is your friend; the whisk is not, once the whipped topping goes in.
- Make it ahead. This salad is designed to be made the day before — it’s better that way.
- Storage: Keep covered and refrigerated for up to 3 days. Stir gently before serving; some liquid may pool, which is normal. Do not freeze — the oranges and marshmallows turn mushy.
- Lighten it up: Use sugar-free pudding mix, nonfat Greek yogurt, and a lite whipped topping.

Nutrition (per serving, based on 10 servings)

Estimates calculated with optional coconut and nuts included. Values vary by brand and portion size.

Nutrient	Amount per Serving
Calories	~215 kcal
Total Fat	~6 g
Saturated Fat	~4 g
Carbohydrates	~37 g
Fiber	~1.5 g
Sugars	~27 g
Protein	~3 g
Sodium	~150 mg
Cholesterol	~5 mg