Orzo Salad with Walnuts and Raisins

 This is a Sicilian-influenced salad, with a wonderful combination of sweet and zesty flavors. It is hearty enough to be a main dish.

Ingredients:

1 cup orzo

1 can chickpeas, drained and rinsed

2 cups spinach coarsely chopped

1 cup grape tomatoes, halved

3 scallions, thinly sliced

½ cup toasted walnuts

½ cup raisins

1/3 cup pitted Kalamata olives, halved

1/3 cup coarsely chopped fresh basil leaves

3 large cloves garlic, crushed

1 shallot, halved

3 Tbsp olive oil

2 Tbsp white wine vinegar

½ tsp sugar

½ tsp red pepper flakes

½ tsp ground fennel seed

½ tsp salt

Fresh ground black pepper to taste

Instructions:

Cook the orzo in boiling water until just tender, about 10 minutes. Rinse under running cold water and drain well, then transfer to a large bowl. Add chickpeas, spinach, tomatoes, scallions, walnuts, raisins, olives and basil. Set Aside.

In a food processor, combine the garlic and shallot and process to a paste. Add the oil, vinegar, sugar, red pepper flakes, fennel, salt and pepper. Process until well blended. Pour dressing over the salad and gently toss until well blended. Serve immediately.