

Pesto and Variations

Bold flavor and color describe these sauces. The first basil pesto from our garden is my herald of summer; I know juicy, ripe tomatoes and just-picked corn are right around the corner.

1/4 c. pine nuts and/or almonds
2 c. lightly packed basil leaves
2 cloves garlic

3/4 c. apx. extra virgin olive oil
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 cup freshly grated parmesan

If you would like a deeper flavor pesto, lightly toast the pine nuts in a dry fry pan on medium high heat, or in the oven on a dry sheet pan for 5-10 minutes at 350°. Put the nuts into a food processor fitted with the steel blade. Process for 5-10 seconds. Add the basil and garlic and pulse until the mixture is chopped. Drizzle the olive oil in gradually until the pesto is the consistency that you like. Add the salt to your liking. Scrape out into a bowl and mix in the parmesan.

If you have no food processor, you can follow the same steps using a mortar and pestle. This is the traditional Italian method.

Cook pasta until firm but tender. Lightly drain, leaving some of the pasta water still clinging to the noodles. Toss with a tablespoon of heavy cream or olive oil. Either dress all the noodles lightly with pesto or serve plain and pass the pesto at the table with additional parmesan, cream, salt & pepper.

Variations

1. In place of all or some of the basil, use any combination of the following:
spinach, parsley, arugula, swiss chard, cilantro, mint.
2. In place of up to half of the olive oil, substitute an equal amount of vegetable stock.
3. Replace the basil with roasted red peppers or reconstituted sun dried tomatoes. Serve these sauces along with basil pesto or instead of basil pesto.
4. In place of up to half of the olive oil, substitute an equal amount of coconut milk.
5. Try a variety of cheeses such as Fontina, Romano, Chevre, Cheddar, or dry, hard cheeses similar to parmesan. Use these in addition to or instead of Parmesan.