

PESTO, PESTO PASTA AND PESTO CANAPÉS

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Pesto

Ingredients for Pesto:

- 4 cups packed fresh basil leaves
- 6- 8 garlic cloves
- 1/2 cup toasted pine nuts (or 1 cup of toasted walnuts)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 cups Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1 cup grated parmesan cheese



To release the oils and enhance the flavor, toast the pine nuts or walnuts on a dry skillet until lightly brown. Be careful not to burn the nuts as it will make them bitter. In the bowl of the food processor, combine the basil, pine nuts and garlic and pulse until coarsely chopped. With the processor running, slowly pour in the olive oil through the feed tube and process until fully incorporated and smooth. Season with salt and pepper. Check for a thick, yet smooth consistency.

Transfer the pesto into a large serving bowl and mix in the cheese by hand. I like to add the grated cheese by hand because I find that the heat of the food processor makes the cheese melt slightly and creates a gummy consistency. The Pesto is now ready to use, but if you would like to store the Pesto for later, I recommend the following:

Refrigerator:

Air is the enemy of Pesto and will turn the sauce brown, so I prefer to store pesto in tall containers, subjecting the least amount to air. To store in the refrigerator, transfer the Pesto to an air-tight container and drizzle with olive oil or plastic wrap placed directly onto the Pesto to form a thin protective layer. Cover tightly and place the container in the refrigerator.

Freezer:

To protect the Pesto, transfer the sauce to an air-tight container and drizzle with olive oil to form a thin protective layer. If using a glass jar, do not replace the cover after filling. Place the uncovered container in the freezer. As with anything, while the Pesto freezes, it will expand. If you cover the jar, it may break. When you cover the jar after the Pesto is frozen, you can safely return to freezer. This process allows you to freeze the Pesto in attractive glass jars, the perfect container for gifting or reusing. When ready to use, defrost in refrigerator.

Pesto Pasta

Ingredients for Pesto Pasta:

- 1 pound Penne or other dry macaroni
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cup whole milk or half-and-half
- 1 cup prepared Pesto
- 1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese (optional)
- 1/4 cup chiffonad fresh basil (optional)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Cook the macaroni in salted water according to the directions on the package until still al dente, slightly firm. To make the Pesto sauce, begin with a white sauce. In a large pot, melt the butter. When butter is melted, add the flour and whisk together over medium-low heat for a minute or two just to get the raw taste out of the flour. This is called a roux. While whisking, add the milk and continue to cook until thick and smooth. To speed up the process, I sometimes pour the milk into a heat resistant cup and warm in the microwave before adding it to the roux. Add the prepared Pesto and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add the cooked pasta to the creamy Pesto sauce and mix well. If the sauce is too thick, add some of the pasta cooking water to the sauce. To serve, spoon Pesto Pasta into a bowl, sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese (optional) and top with fresh basil chiffonad (optional). To make fresh basil chiffonad, make a pile of 6 – 8 basil leaves, roll the leaves lengthwise to form a cigar and slice into thin shreds.



Pesto Canapés

Ingredients Pesto Canapés:

- 1 crusty baguette
- 1 cup prepared pesto
- 2– 3 tomatoes thinly sliced
- Fresh Mozzarella cheese or grated Mozzarella
- Dried oregano (optional)

Slice the baguette into 1/4" slices. If the baguette is thin, cut on the bias to make elongated slices. Toast the bread on a dry griddle or for added flavor, toast on a buttered griddle. Spread a small amount of Pesto on each slice of bread, add a thin slice of tomato and top with Mozzarella cheese. If using a larger tomato, cut each slice in half. If using pre-shredded Mozzarella, sprinkle with dried oregano and broil for 1 minute or until Mozzarella is melted. If using fresh Mozzarella, broiling is optional. Serve at room temperature.

