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Butternut Squash Gnocchi, Pistachio Pesto

When they think about pesto, most people think about the popular green sauce made from fresh basil and served with everything from pasta to poached seafood. In fact, the word pesto simply means pounded – ingredients that have been smashed with a pestle in a mortar. Today, purists look the other way and use a blender to quickly create pesto.

I prefer pistachios over almost any other nut. So it seemed that the very green, subtly flavored pistachios in combination with the more intensely flavored, bright orange butternut squash gnocchi would be just the right expression of my taste.

Serves 4-6

1 recipe Butternut Squash Gnocchi (see below)
1 cup raw shelled pistachio nuts
1 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 clove garlic
1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Place the pistachio nuts on a baking sheet with sides. Toast until you can smell the nuts and they are golden, about 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool.
2. Add the toasted nuts, extra virgin olive oil, garlic, and salt to the jar of a blender and process until coarsely chopped.
3. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.
4. Add the pistachio pesto to a 10-inch skillet. Add the Parmesan cheese and stir to combine.
5. Add the gnocchi to the boiling water and cook until they float to the top. Cook for 1 more minute. Use a wire-mesh skimmer to remove the gnocchi from the pot and place them directly in the skillet. Carefully stir into the sauce.
6. Serve immediately.

(continued on page 2)



Butternut Squash Gnocchi, Pistachio Pesto, (continued)

Butternut Squash Gnocchi

Butternut squash gnocchi, inspired by gnocchi di zucca, pumpkin gnocchi, a traditional dish from northern Italy's Lombardy region, are even more temperamental than potato gnocchi. Because butternut squash don't contain as much starch as potatoes, you'll have to knead the dough a little longer than you do for the potato gnocchi in order to release the starch.

Makes about 2-1/2 pounds gnocchi

One 2- to 2-1/2-pound butternut squash
1-1/2 pounds unpeeled Idaho potatoes
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 egg
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
Rice flour for dusting

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Wrap the butternut squash in aluminum foil. Bake until a tester passes easily through the thickest part of the squash, about 1-1/2 hours.
2. Gently boil the potatoes in their jackets in a large pot of water over medium heat until a tester passes easily through the thickest part. Remove the potatoes from the pot and let cool to the touch; they shouldn't get completely cool.
3. Wrap the potatoes in a kitchen towel or cotton napkin and rub to remove the skins. Pass the potatoes through a food mill fitted with a medium-hole disk, or through a ricer, into a large mixing bowl.
4. When the squash is cool to the touch, cut it into quarters. Remove the seeds and discard. Remove the flesh and measure 2 cups. Save the remaining squash for another use. Pass the cooked squash through the food mill directly into the mixing bowl.
5. Spread the all-purpose flour on a clean, dry work surface. Place the potatoes and butternut squash on top of the flour. Add the egg, salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Use your hands to gather the ingredients together and gently knead the dough in to a 10 by 8-inch log. Let rest for 2 minutes.
6. Lightly dust a dry work surface with rice flour. Cut the log into 4 equal pieces. Roll each piece into a 1-inch-thick rope. Cut each rope into 1/2-inch gnocchi. Store the gnocchi on a rice flour-covered baking sheet until ready for use. Dust with rice flour.