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Chicken and Rice Salad with Mint Pesto and Peas

Serves 4.

This is a great salad for a summer picnic or to bring to the beach, though it also works well in those last weeks of winter to summon the warm breezes of spring.

1-1/2 cup frozen peas, thawed
Good basic kitchen salt, like kosher (for water)
1-3/4 cups water
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
1 cup long grain white rice
2 cups packed fresh mint leaves, plus a small handful of leaves for garnish
1 cup fresh basil leaves
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
1/4 cup pine nuts
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
1 small garlic clove, peeled
1-1/2 cups small to medium shreds roast chicken
1 small cucumber, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1/4-inch cubes
3 scallions, thinly sliced on a long diagonal

Cook peas in a small saucepan of boiling salted water until tender, about 2 minutes. Drain and set aside.

Bring the 1-3/4 cups water, 1 tablespoon oil, and 1/2 teaspoon salt to a boil in a 2-quart saucepan, then stir in rice. Return to a boil and cover. Reduce heat to low and simmer the rice until the water is absorbed and rice is tender, about 15 minutes. Fluff rice with a fork and let stand, covered, 5 minutes. Spread the rice on a baking sheet and let cool to room temperature.

In a food processor, combine 1/2 cup of the peas, mint, basil, cheese, pine nuts, lemon juice, garlic, oil, and remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt. Puree until smooth.

In a bowl, toss together the rice, remaining 1 cup of peas, pesto, chicken, cucumber, and about 2/3 of the scallions. Transfer to a serving bowl and sprinkle with the remaining scallions and mint leaves.