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Classic Pesto

Makes about 1 cup

“Classic” is a loose term when it comes to pesto. While its reputation calls for basil, pine nuts, garlic, Parmesan cheese, and olive oil, the proportions vary according to the number of individuals asked about their version of “classic.” Here’s our version:

3 cups fresh basil leaves, packed
1/2 cup pine nuts
1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
2 cloves, garlic
2 T. fresh lemon juice
1/2 cup olive oil
Salt to taste

Place the basil, pine nuts, Parmesan cheese, garlic, and lemon juice in a food processor. Pulse until a coarse mixture is achieved. Scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed. Drizzle in the olive oil and pulse to emulsify and combine. Taste and adjust the salt accordingly.

Serving Suggestions

Serve on pasta for a classic presentation. Vegetables love pesto; cook vegetables to crisp-tender and add the pesto tossing to coat. Add as a condiment to sandwiches. Thin with olive oil and use as a salad dressing.

Pistachio-Herb Pesto

Makes about 1 cup

This pesto is woven together with different herbal accents making for a complex topping. The crunchy texture and concentrated flavor create a dynamic crust for pork chops or sea bass.

1/2 cup salted roasted pistachio nuts
2 tablespoons chopped fresh lemon thyme
3 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon
1 garlic clove, minced
1-1/2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
4 to 5 tablespoons olive oil

Place the nuts, thyme, parsley, tarragon, garlic, lemon juice, and cheese in the bowl of a food processor and pulse until a coarse mixture forms. With the machine running, gradually stream in the oil and blend until the pesto emulsifies.

Serving Suggestions

Generously spoon over grilled or roasted pork chops. For a simple salad, thin the pesto with more olive oil and spoon over thick slices of fresh heirloom tomatoes. Paddle a thick layer of this pesto onto sea bass or halibut and broil or bake.

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Thai Pesto

Makes about 3/4 cup

This recipe is an ode to the delicate blend of herbs and spices commonly found in Thai cuisine -- in this case, a blend of ginger, lime, and lemongrass. If you like your food hot, feel free to up the ante by adding more jalapeño.

1 cup packed fresh basil leaves
1/2 cup chopped cashews
Zest from 1 lime
Juice from 1/2 lime
1 teaspoon peeled and grated fresh ginger
1 to 2 jalapeño peppers, seeded, chopped
1 teaspoon soy sauce (dark or light)
1/4 teaspoon dried lemongrass
3 tablespoons olive oil

Place the basil, cashews, lime zest and juice, ginger, jalapeño, soy sauce, and lemongrass in the bowl of a food processor and pulse until a coarse mixture forms. With the machine running, gradually stream in the oil and blend until the pesto emulsifies.

Serving Suggestions

Toss with shrimp, 1 to 2 tablespoons of oil, your favorite Asian noodles (such as wheat, egg, ramen, or rice noodles), and sautéed mushrooms and onions. Add to any stir-fry. As an appetizer, serve wonton cups filled with seared fish that has been mixed with the pesto and garnish with ribbons of fresh basil. Brush wonton wrappers with a little melted butter, press them into the depressions of mini muffin tins and bake for 6 to 8 minutes, until lightly browned and crisp. Remove from the tins and let cool on wire racks.

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Cilantro Pesto

Makes about 3/4 cup

While cilantro looks similar to Italian parsley, the taste is quite different. Some call the flavor grassy and clean, while others say it's biting and tangy. However you describe it, it makes for a distinct and vivid pesto.

2 cups packed cilantro leaves
1/4 cup pine nuts, raw or toasted
1 large garlic clove, chopped
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
6 tablespoons olive oil

Place the cilantro, nuts, garlic, cheese, lime juice, salt, and pepper in the bowl of a food processor and blend until a coarse mixture forms. With the machine running, gradually stream in the oil and blend until the pesto emulsifies.

Serving Suggestions

Toss with grilled or sautéed shrimp. Toss with pasta, 3 tablespoons olive oil, and diced fresh red pepper. Stir into rice or risotto with corn kernels and queso fresco or other Mexican cheese. Use as a condiment for a grilled vegetable panini. Add to a stacked salad with thick slices of tomato, avocado, and queso fresco. Garnish with finely chopped red onion and/or chopped cilantro.

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