

## **Pesto Pasta Sauce With a Bite**

This simple recipe provides a basic pesto sauce that can be used over a variety of noodles. It is quick to make and is great for last minute noodles to go with a pork or chicken dish.

### **Ingredients**

- 2 cups fresh basil leaves, packed
- ½ cup grated Romano cheese (Parmesan will do as well)
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1/3 cup pine nuts
- 3 garlic cloves, finely minced

Place basil leaves in small batches in food processor and whip until well chopped (do about 3/4 cup at a time). Add about 1/3 the nuts and garlic, blend again.

Add about 1/3 of the Parmesan cheese; blend while slowly adding about 1/3 of the olive oil, stopping to scrape down sides of container.

Repeat until all ingredients are used. Be sure to mix all batches together well. Basil pesto will keep in refrigerator for about one week.

If the pesto is too thick, add a bit more olive oil. With pesto, you can adjust all of the ingredients to suit your particular taste. This recipe is just a guideline.

If you plan to freeze it, omit the cheese. Place the pesto in an ice cube tray until frozen and then remove from the tray and store in a freezer bag. When you are ready to use it, defrost the appropriate amount and add the cheese (Use enough cheese to equal about half of the volume of the pesto you defrosted).

## **Meal #1: Pesto al Fusilli with Grilled Pork Skewers**

For this meal, you will need to have a set of metal skewers. You can use bamboo ones but they tend to burn on the ends and so you'll need to wrap the exposed bamboo in aluminum foil before grilling.

### **Ingredients You'll Need for the Meal**

Basic Pesto Sauce (see recipe above) – freshly made or frozen  
Fusillia Pasta – one package

### **Ingredients for Skewers**

1½ lb (750 g) Pork loin, cut into 1- inch (2.5 cm) cubes  
1 onion cut into 1" (2.5 cm) pieces  
1 green or yellow pepper cut into 1" (2.5 cm) pieces  
12 button mushrooms – washed and patted dry

### **Marinade**

3 cloves garlic, minced  
1 1/2 tbsp (20 mL) ground ginger  
3 tbsp (45 mL) orange juice, preferably fresh  
1 tsp (5 mL) grated orange zest  
2 tbsp (25 mL) olive oil  
Salt and pepper (optional)

### **The Night Before**

Cube the pork. Combine the marinade ingredients (garlic, ginger, orange juice, orange zest (rind), and olive oil). Put the pork and the marinade in a covered bowl and refrigerate overnight.

Step 1: Prepare the pesto as directed earlier and set aside.

Step 2: Remove the meat from the marinade and discard the liquid. Thread the pork onto skewers alternating with the onions, peppers and mushrooms. (You could substitute almost any vegetable such as cauliflower, carrots or leeks for the ones I've suggested here).

Step 3: Preheat the grill to medium to high. If you don't have a grill, use the broiler in your oven.

Step 4: Put the skewers on the grill or under the broiler. Set the timer for 20 minutes. **Turn the skewers frequently for even cooking.**

Step 5: Start the pot of water on the stove as per the directions that came with the pasta.

Step 6: When the water is boiling, add the fusilli and cook for the length of time recommended on the package – about 12 to 14 minutes.

Step 7: When pasta is ready, drain and return to pot. Add pesto a bit at a time and toss. Continue to add pesto until the pasta is well-coated. Put the lid on the pot and set aside.

Step 8: Serve. Remove skewers from oven or grill and place one per plate. Add a side of pesto al fusilli and enjoy.

For a change of pace and a whole new flavor, you can substitute fresh spinach for the basil in the pesto recipe. The substitution will remove the bite of the pesto and replace it with a more subtle taste.

## **Meal #2: Broiled Salmon with Pesto New Potatoes**

Eating Italian doesn't always mean having pasta. Many Italian foods are hearty meat and potatoes kind of meals. This one is incredibly tasty.

### **Ingredients You'll Need for the Meal**

Basic Pesto Sauce (see recipe above) – freshly made or frozen

Salmon Steaks (one per person) – fresh, not frozen\*

Olive oil

1-2 garlic cloves (finely chopped)

1 lemon (cut into wedges)

2 pounds new (or baby) potatoes (cut in halves)

1 package frozen vegetables

\*Frozen salmon tends to have a stronger flavor than fresh. The delicate taste is what you are after.

Step 1: Preheat oven to 350°F. Rub salmon steaks with a mixture of olive oil and garlic. Place salmon steaks in a roasting pan (lightly coated in olive oil). Place pot of slightly salted water on the stove to boil.

Step 2: Once water begins to boil, add the new potatoes. Place the salmon pan into the oven. Set timer for about 20 minutes.

Step 3: With 5 minutes left on the timer, test the potatoes with a fork. If ready, drain and return to the pot. Cover. Put frozen vegetables in a microwave safe dish and put into the microwave. Cook on high for 4 ½ minutes.

Step 4: Add some pesto to the potatoes a little at a time. Toss. Continue until the potatoes are well coated. Cover. Check the salmon. If the meat is flaky, it is ready.

Step 5: Serve. Put one salmon steak, a portion of potatoes and a portion of vegetables on each plate. Garnish with a lemon wedge.

## **Meal #3: Baked Fish with Potato Salad & Green Beans**

Italy is surrounded by water and as a result, fish is a major component of Italian meals.

### **Ingredients You'll Need for the Meal**

1 pound fresh green beans

### **For the Main Dish**

Thick Cod or Pollock Fillets– one per person

Basic Pesto Sauce (see recipe above) – freshly made or frozen

6 tbsp fresh breadcrumbs

2 tbsp lemon juice

1oz mozzarella cheese, grated

salt and black pepper (optional – I rarely use either of these in any of my dishes)

### **For the Potato Salad**

4 cups new (or baby) potatoes – cut in half

1 cup mayonnaise

1 teaspoon mustard (Dijon is best)

1/2 teaspoon celery seeds

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon pepper

2 hard boiled eggs, chopped

1/2 cup onion, chopped

1/2 cup celery, finely chopped

1/2 cup sweet pickles, finely chopped (you can substitute dill pickles for a change in taste)

### **Do ahead**

A few hours before the meal (it can be the night before although not preferable), cook the potatoes for about 18 minutes (until firm). Once cooked, drain and set into a bowl (not metal). Cover and place in the fridge to cool. If you are cooking the potatoes the night before, place them in an air-tight container before putting them in the fridge.

Step 1: Preheat oven to 400°F.

Step 2: Mix pesto, breadcrumbs, lemon juice and grated mozzarella. Place fish fillets on a baking sheet and spread mixture evenly over the fillets. Put fish in oven uncovered and set the timer for 20 to 25 minutes (The fish may take 25 minutes but check at the 20 minute mark just in case. The fish is done when the meat is flaky and separates easily).

Step 3: Remove potatoes from the fridge and transfer to a large wooden or ceramic bowl. In a smaller bowl, combine the mayonnaise, mustard, celery seeds, salt and pepper. Mix well. Add the chopped egg, celery and pickles and mix together to combine.

Step 4: Pour dressing over potatoes and mix lightly so as not to break up the potatoes too much. Cover and chill until time to serve.

Step 5: With 5 minutes remaining on the timer, place the beans in a microwave safe dish and cook in the microwave for 4 minutes on high.

Step 6: When the fish is done, serve. One fillet, some potato salad and beans on each plate.

### **Olive Oil – Levels of Quality**

In many grocery stores, you will see a mystifying array of olive oils. Here is what the names and types mean:

**Olio d'oliva extra vergine:** Extra virgin olive oil from the first pressing, of the best quality.

**Olio d'oliva vergine:** Virgin olive oil from the second and third pressings, still of very good quality

**Olio d'oliva:** Olive oil (also called pure olive oil), blended from native and refined oil. The taste is less subtle.

**Olio di sansa d'oliva:** Olive pomace oil, obtained almost exclusively from the pomace residues left after pressing, extracted with the aid of solvents.

## Spaghetti Ice Cream

Here is a treat that is perfect for young children but great for adults too. It is not Italian but it is fun. It takes a bit of preparation so start to make the dessert the night before. For this dessert, you will need a potato ricer (a tool not many households have today but worth investing in when you see the faces of those lucky enough to be served spaghetti ice cream).

### Ingredients

Vanilla Ice Cream

Strawberry Jam or Preserves

Flaked or Shredded Coconut

### Method

**The Night Before:** Let the ice cream thaw a bit (this takes some practice as you do not want hard ice cream but you do not want it runny either. It takes about an hour to properly soften the ice cream). While you are softening the ice cream, chill the dessert plates. Make sure you have enough room in your freezer to place the covered plates in a single layer.

Once the ice cream is soft. Place some into the ricer and force it onto one of the dessert plates. Move the ricer around as you squeeze to get the ice cream threads to form squiggles. It will look like spaghetti noodles. Continue, reloading the ricer as necessary, until you have enough ice cream on the plate. Repeat for the number of desserts you want to make. Cover each loosely with wax paper and return to the freezer.

**Final Step:** When you are ready to serve the dessert, remove the plates of ice cream from the freezer. Put one or two generous scoops of room temperature strawberry jam to each and top with a sprinkling of shredded coconut. Enjoy.