

Summer Pesto

1 large bunch of fresh basil, washed well, stems removed

4 – 6 garlic cloves, peeled

1 – 4 tablespoons olive oil

1 – 2 teaspoons kosher salt

Freshly ground pepper to taste

Optional: 2 tablespoons of feta or non-fat cottage cheese; a small handful of toasted pine nuts or walnuts, grated Parmesan to pass when the pasta is served

Traditional pesto is far more fattening than it needs to be. I use various versions of a basil/garlic paste all summer as a pasta sauce, marinade and to liven up vegetable sautés and soups. Mince garlic in a food processor. Add basil leaves, 1+ tablespoons of the oil, and the nuts if desired, salt and pepper. Process until the ingredients forms a thick paste. Adjust the oil, depending on how you plan to use it. As a pasta sauce, you'll need 3 – 4 tablespoons. To add to a vegetable sauté or soup, you'll need just one. Reserve a cup of pasta water before you drain the pasta and use some of it to moisten as you toss the pasta with the pesto.

Adding the cottage cheese makes a creamy pesto pasta sauce that allows you to cut back on the oil. The feta gives it a different and delicious taste. Waiting to add Parmesan until you serve the pasta saves hundreds of calories.

Roasted Tomato Pesto Sauce

Halve a few pounds of plum tomatoes, roast them in a 300-degree oven for 90 minutes or a hotter oven for less. The skins will shrivel and you can pull them off easily when the tomatoes cool. Chop the tomatoes and add the pesto. Or, puree the tomatoes in the food processor with the pesto. (If fresh tomatoes aren't available, you can use canned diced tomatoes. I roast 2 large cans in their juice at 300-degrees for several hours, until the juice absorbs. Sometimes I make it with more pesto and just 1 large can – or 1 large and 1 small can.)

Raw Tomato Pesto Sauce

Use only the best summer tomatoes for this sauce or you'll be disappointed. Halve a few pounds of tomatoes crosswise, seed them and chop the flesh. Salt, and let stand for at least an hour, preferably more. Pour off the liquid that accumulates. Add pesto to taste (I usually use about half and freeze the rest), a few tablespoons of chopped red onion and a few tablespoons of good olive oil.