

Pesto - From Genoa

Handmade pesto (using a mortar and pestle or finely chopping/mincing) may give a superior flavour and texture to that made using a food processor or stick blender. The key herb is basil but occasionally the Genoese will add some parsley. Use pine nuts if available, otherwise use walnuts – don't use pine nuts or walnuts that are not fresh tasting. Pesto is normally used as a sauce for pasta but it can be used in many other ways, for example, spooned over steamed potatoes, salads or soups, sprinkled over pizza toppings or in stuffings. (If you are after a salsa verde effect, leave out the parmesan and nuts; the sauce is quite vibrant without them and they can be added later as required. Slightly wet basil will give a watery sauce.)

For two to four people:

- one packed litre fresh basil leaves, washed and well-dried
- (optional) flat leaf parsley
- 1/2 cups pine nuts (or walnuts)
- 3 to 5 medium cloves garlic, peeled
- 1/2 to 2/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese, finely grated



Method:

Mince or puree the ingredients using one of the following methods.

With a mortar and pestle, start crushing the basil, nuts, garlic and a dash of salt and oil. Add the oil in stages, and add the parmesan only at the end. Test for salt and pepper.

If chopping by hand, mince the basil, nuts and garlic with a dash of salt on a board. Transfer to a bowl and add other ingredients as for mortar and pestle.

If using a food processor or stick blender, blend basil, nuts and garlic with some oil. Add more oil, ensuring a suitable texture. Try to aim for a texture where the nuts and basil are finely chopped but not totally pureed. Remove to another container. Add parmesan to taste and adjust taste for salt and pepper. Use just enough salt to bring out all the flavours.

Spoon over cooked pasta, make bruschetta, toss through vegetables, use as a dip, etc.

Serve:

Enough for 6 to 12 servings, depending on how it is to be used.

Equipment:

Mortar and pestle, or chopping board and knife, or stick blender or food processor.

Difficulty and Time:

Not difficult (2/5). 15 to 20 minutes to prepare.

Notes and variations:

- Try this 'classic' method first before experimenting with other ingredients.
- Also see Salsa Verde and Chimichurri recipes.