

Pasta Salad with Pesto

SERVES 8 TO 10 AS A SIDE DISH

This salad is best served the day it is made; if it's been refrigerated, bring it to room temperature before serving. The pesto can be made a day ahead—just cook the garlic cloves in a small saucepan of boiling water for one minute. Garnish with additional shaved or grated Parmesan.

- ¾ cup pine nuts
- 2 medium cloves garlic, unpeeled
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 pound farfalle (bow ties) pasta
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil plus 1 additional tablespoon
- 3 cups packed fresh basil leaves (about 4 ounces)
- 1 cup baby spinach (packed), about 1 ounce
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1½ ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (¾ cup), plus extra for serving
- 6 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, quartered, or grape tomatoes, halved (optional)

1. Bring 4 quarts water to rolling boil in large pot. Toast pine nuts in small dry skillet over medium heat, shaking pan occasionally, until just golden and fragrant, 4 to 5 minutes.

2. When water is boiling, add garlic and let cook 1 minute. Remove garlic with slotted spoon and rinse under cold water to stop cooking; set aside to cool. Add 1 tablespoon salt and pasta to water, stir to separate, and cook until tender (just past al dente). Reserve ¼ cup cooking water, drain pasta, toss with 1 tablespoon oil, spread in single layer on rimmed baking sheet, and cool to room temperature, about 30 minutes.

3. When garlic is cool, peel and mince or press through garlic press. Place ¼ cup nuts, garlic, basil, spinach, pepper, lemon juice, remaining ¼ cup oil, and remaining 1 teaspoon salt in bowl of food processor and process until smooth, scraping sides of bowl as necessary. Add cheese and mayonnaise and process until thoroughly combined. Transfer mixture to large serving bowl. Cover and refrigerate until ready to assemble salad.

4. When pasta is cool, toss with pesto, adding reserved pasta water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until pesto evenly coats pasta. Fold in remaining ½ cup nuts and tomatoes (if using); serve.



Photography by Daniel J. van Ackere



WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: When we developed our Pasta Salad with Pesto recipe, we discovered a trick to prevent the pesto's bright-green color from dulling. Adding another green element to the pesto—fresh baby spinach—provided long-lasting color without interfering with the basil flavor. Adding mayonnaise to the pesto created the perfect binder, keeping the salad creamy and luscious and preventing it from clumping up and drying out.

TECHNIQUE

Two Secrets to Better Pasta Salad with Pesto

It's not hard to make a pesto pasta salad taste good. To get the appearance and texture to live up to the vibrant flavors, we came up with two easy tricks.



Adding a touch of mayonnaise made the too-slick pesto creamy and cohesive.



Supplementing the basil with baby spinach helped maintain the pesto's bright-green color.