

## Basil Pesto

This recipe is great for pizza, pasta, chicken, shrimp, or whatever else goes well with a basil/garlic flavor boost. Like almost everything else listed on the health department's website, don't be afraid to play around with the recipe...I always do. I suggest sunflower seeds as an alternative to pine nuts. Pine nuts are expensive. Sunflower seeds have a similar oil content, fairly neutral flavor, and produce a great texture in the pesto.

The biggest time investment when making your own pesto is the time it takes to pick the basil leaves off of the stems. Otherwise, it comes together in the food processor in about one minute. Use the time it takes to pick and rinse the basil leaves to roast the garlic cloves.

You can easily double or triple the recipe. When I pull basil out of the garden, I almost always have enough to double the recipe. This pesto freezes perfectly. It's great to pull bright green, homemade pesto out of the freezer in January.

I have no financial ties with any brand names listed in any recipes. When I come across a brand that works particularly well in a recipe and is a good value, I mention it for your consideration. Any way you make it, it's a lot cheaper and tastes a lot better than the pre-made pesto you can buy in the store.

2 cups of fresh basil leaves- loosely packed

3 cloves of garlic

¼ cup of pine nuts or sunflower seeds (unsalted)

1/3 cup of extra virgin olive oil (I use Whole Foods 365 brand)

1 tsp kosher salt (people with high blood pressure or kidney disease can cut this in half or omit it completely)

½ tsp of freshly ground black pepper

Rinse the basil leaves and spin them to remove the excess water (important). If you don't have a salad spinner, it's pretty inexpensive investment and comes in handy more than you would think. While you are plucking the leaves off of the stems, put the UNPEELED garlic cloves in a toaster oven at 325 degrees for 10-15 minutes. The garlic is ready when a bit of the insides start to ooze out through the peel. After the garlic is done, toast the pine nuts or sunflower seeds at 300 degrees x 2-3 minutes. Keep a close eye on them. As soon as they start to brown, remove them so they don't burn.

Add the basil leaves, garlic, and pine nuts to a food processor. Pulse a few times. Then gradually pour in half of the olive oil while the processor is on. Stop the processor. Add the salt and pepper. Turn the processor back on as you add the remaining oil. That's it! Store it in a glass container. Put a piece of plastic directly on the pesto to prevent it from turning brown. If you're going to freeze it, thaw it in the fridge for 12-24 hours or you can microwave it on a low setting before using.

Buon Appetito