

# Fresh Basil Pesto

Fresh Basil Pesto tastes like summer, and conjures up memories of our trip to Cinque Terre on the Ligurian coast of Italy, where this sauce originated (in nearby in Genova). This sauce has many uses: on pizza, pasta, fish, shrimp, chicken, or to dress vegetables. It is equally good warm or cold.

Pesto freezes well. I make a double recipe once or twice each summer, with basil I grow in my garden. I transfer the pesto to 4 ounce disposable food containers and pour a thin layer of olive oil over the top, which keeps it fresh and green (this can also be done with leftover pesto which you plan to store in the refrigerator). A single recipe will yield two containers.

6 servings

2 cups packed fresh basil leaves—  
stems removed

1 tablespoon fresh Italian parsley—  
chopped (optional)

1/4 cup walnuts or pine nuts—  
lightly toasted

2-3 cloves fresh Garlic—lightly toasted

1/4 teaspoon salt (preferably sea salt)

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

1/2 cup finely grated Parmigiano-  
Reggiano

2 tablespoon softened butter (optional)

1 teaspoon fresh squeezed Lemon Juice  
(optional)

1. If using walnuts, chop roughly. Toast nuts in a dry, heavy duty skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently until golden and fragrant, about 4-5 minutes. Set aside.
2. Place garlic cloves (skin on) in the same skillet. Toast, shaking the pan periodically, until they darken slightly in color and become fragrant, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board to cool, skin and chop roughly.
3. De-stem, rinse and dry fresh basil using a salad spinner or paper towels. Place the basil, parsley, nuts, garlic, salt and olive oil in food processor. Process until semi-smooth. You'll need to stop the processor once or twice to scrape down the bowl.
4. Transfer the pesto to a bowl. Stir in the grated cheese and butter and lemon juice if using. Taste and adjust salt if needed. If freezing, transfer to small containers and top with a thin layer of oil. It can also be refrigerated for 3-4 days. Place in a food storage container and cover with a thin layer of oil.

## Fresh Basil:

Obviously you want the freshest basil possible! If you don't want to grow your own, one option is to purchase a live plant from your local farmer's market (they often carry them at Trader Joe's as well). Most supermarkets carry fresh basil. You'll need at least four ounces to provide the 2 cups of leaves you need for a single recipe.





## Frankie's Tips:

- ◆ Be sure to remove the stems from the basil, especially the larger ones. If left in your pesto it will be very stringy.
- ◆ The Parsley is not critical but I like the flavor dimension it brings. It also brightens the color.
- ◆ If you are willing to take a couple of extra steps, they will make your pesto that little bit better. The first is to toast the nuts in a dry skillet, which will enhance their flavor. The other is to toast the garlic as well, which will tame the harshness which raw garlic can bring.
- ◆ Adding butter is a tip I learned from Marcella Hazan's cook book, *Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking*. I've made it with and without and like both. The butter adds a touch of creaminess and richness.
- ◆ The optional lemon juice is something one of my chef's came up with. I like the freshness it adds to the flavor. Its acidity will also help the pesto maintain its bright green color.
- ◆ Heat is the enemy of pesto! When using for pasta, do not heat pesto in a pan or it will separate and become bitter. Simply toss it with the warm pasta and an ounce or two of hot pasta water.
- ◆ Walnuts vs pine nuts. Pine nuts are traditional and will give you the smoothest, creamiest pesto, but they are very expensive. Walnuts are an excellent substitute, but make sure your guests are not allergic. I've even used pecans and was happy with the results.