

NUT FREE PESTO PASTA

(serves 4-6)

Ingredients:

For the pesto

1/3 cup olive oil

1/2 large or one small avocado

4 cups packed baby spinach

2 cups packed basil

2 cloves garlic

1-1/2 tbsp lime juice

1/3 cup shredded Parmesan cheese, plus more for topping

1/2 tsp salt

1/4 tsp pepper

One pack 16 oz pasta, any shape you like.

Handful of multicolored heirloom cherry tomatoes - optional

Preparation:

Prepare the ingredients: Wash the basil and spinach. Separate the basil leaves from the stem. Peel the garlic cloves. Half and stone the avocado and scoop out the flesh. Grate the Parmesan cheese. Juice the lime.

Place the olive oil, avocado flesh, garlic, lime juice, Parmesan, salt and pepper in the bowl of the food processor first. Then add spinach and basil leaves and process until smooth. If all the spinach and basil don't fit at once, add whatever fits comfortably and pulse a couple of times before adding the rest in. Blend. Stop and scrape the sides with a spatula as required and blend again.

Taste and adjust the seasoning. I usually need to add a little more salt & lime juice at this point.

Cook a 16 oz pasta as per package instructions until al dente. Reserve one cup pasta water and drain the pasta. Return the pasta to the pot and add all the spinach pesto. Stir to combine. If the pesto seems dry, add reserved pasta water a little at a time until the sauce coats the pasta well.

Toss in halved cherry tomatoes if using. Top with freshly grated Parmesan cheese and a drizzle of olive oil.

Recipe Notes:

This is not a recipe to use up the wilting leaves that have been sitting in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator for a few days. Use the freshest ingredients you can find. Since the recipe uses such few ingredients and they are not being cooked, there is no scope to hide anything. Each ingredient will shine through.

Instead of buying shredded Parmesan or parm powder, I'd recommend you buy a block of cheese and grate it. It only takes an extra minute but makes a huge difference in flavor. Plus you avoid all the unnecessary anti-caking additives that are added to pre-shredded cheese.

Try a VARIATION of pesto by replacing all of the spinach with 2 packed cups of lacinato kale. Kids love the feel of tough dinosaur kale leaves.

The pesto also is great with grilled or roasted vegetables, or in a sandwich with sliced tomatoes, salt & crushed black pepper.