

Authentic Italian Basil Pesto Recipe

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Growing up in Tuscany, fresh basil was one of those ingredients that signaled summer had arrived. When the garden was overflowing, we'd gather handfuls of fragrant basil and make pesto the traditional way—with a mortar and pestle. Crushing the basil by hand releases its natural oils and creates a rich, rustic texture that's difficult to achieve with blades.

That said, I know life gets busy, and not everyone has the time or a mortar and pestle tucked away in the cupboard. The good news is this recipe works beautifully in a food processor or blender too. While the traditional method is my favorite because of its texture and flavor, you'll still end up with a delicious homemade pesto that's far better than anything from a jar.

Whether you're making it the old-fashioned way or taking the quicker route, this authentic Italian basil pesto is one of

the simplest and most flavorful sauces you can make. Toss it with pasta, spoon it over grilled chicken or fish, spread it on sandwiches, or swirl it into soups—once you make it fresh, you'll want to keep a batch in your refrigerator all summer long.

Things to know about this Authentic Italian Basil Pesto Recipe

Why Use a Mortar and Pestle?

Traditional pesto is made by crushing ingredients rather than cutting them with blades. This gentle method releases the basil's essential oils without overheating the leaves, resulting in a fresher flavor and a more rustic texture.

How to Store Pesto

Store pesto in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 5 days. To help prevent browning, pour a thin layer of olive oil over the surface before sealing.

Pesto can also be frozen for up to 3 months. Freeze in ice cube trays for convenient portions.

Serving Suggestions

- Toss with spaghetti, linguine, or trofie pasta
- Spread on toasted bruschetta
- Stir into soups
- Drizzle over sliced tomatoes and mozzarella
- Spoon onto grilled vegetables
- Use as a sandwich spread

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use walnuts instead of pine nuts?

Yes. Walnuts are a traditional variation in many Italian homes and provide a rich, earthy flavor.

Can I make pesto in a food processor?

Absolutely. While the mortar and pestle method is traditional, a food processor offers a quick alternative.

Why is my pesto turning brown?

Exposure to air causes oxidation. Covering the surface with olive oil helps preserve the bright green color.

Final Thoughts

This authentic Italian basil pesto recipe is proof that a handful of simple ingredients can create something truly special. Whether you're harvesting basil from your garden or picking up a fresh bunch at the market, making pesto by hand is a wonderful way to slow down and enjoy a timeless Italian tradition.

More Italian Recipes You'll Love

If you enjoyed this authentic Italian basil pesto recipe, here are a few more fresh, seasonal recipes to try:

- **Classic Italian Bruschetta** – The perfect appetizer for showcasing ripe summer tomatoes and fresh basil.
- **Lemon Ricotta Pasta and Peas** – A light, creamy pasta that's ideal for spring and summer.
- **Italian Tomato Salad** – Juicy tomatoes, basil, olive oil, and simple Mediterranean flavors.

- **Orecchiette with Italian Sausage and Cherry Tomatoes** – A hearty pasta dinner that's ready in under an hour.
- **Chicken Pomodoro** – Tender chicken simmered with fresh tomatoes, garlic, and basil.
- **Pasta all'Ortolana** – A colorful vegetable pasta that's perfect for using garden produce.
- **Homemade Focaccia Bread** – Delicious served warm with a spread of fresh basil pesto.

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Fresh basil, garlic, pine nuts, Parmesan, Pecorino Romano, and extra virgin olive oil come together in this authentic Italian basil pesto recipe. Made the traditional way with a mortar and pestle—or easily in a food processor or blender—this vibrant homemade pesto is perfect for pasta, sandwiches, grilled meats, vegetables, and more.

- 4 cups fresh basil leaves (washed trimmed and dried)
- 3 gloves cloves garlic
- 1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/3 cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1. **Crush the Garlic and Pine Nuts**

Place the garlic and pine nuts in a mortar. Using the pestle, crush them into a rough paste.

2. **Add the Basil**

Add a handful of basil leaves along with the salt. Continue crushing and grinding until the basil breaks down and releases its oils. Add the remaining basil and continue until smooth.

3. **Stir in the Cheese**

Mix in the Parmesan and Pecorino Romano cheeses until combined.

4. **Add the Olive Oil**

Slowly drizzle in the olive oil while stirring. Continue until the pesto becomes creamy and well blended.

5. **Serve**

Toss with hot pasta, spoon over grilled chicken or fish, spread on crostini, or drizzle over roasted vegetables.

Side Dish

Italian

Authentic Italian basil pesto, basil pesto recipe, homemade pesto,