

BASIL PESTO — If your pesto typically turns army green shortly after you make it, you'll appreciate the beauty of this version. I blanch the basil briefly to set the color, and I add a pinch of powdered ascorbic acid (vitamin C), which keeps the pesto from oxidizing.

2 cups firmly packed fresh basil leaves

1/3 cup olive oil

3 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted

1/2 teaspoon minced garlic

Sea salt, preferably gray salt

Powdered ascorbic acid (vitamin C)

1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Prepare a bowl of ice water. Bring a saucepan of water to a boil. Put the basil in a sieve and plunge it into the boiling water, pushing the leaves down into the water and stirring them so they blanch evenly. Blanch for 15 seconds, then plunge the basil into the ice water to cool quickly. Drain immediately, squeeze the basil dry, and chop it roughly.

In a blender, puree the basil with the oil, pine nuts, garlic, salt to taste, and a pinch of ascorbic acid. When well blended, add the cheese and whirl briefly just to mix. Transfer to a bowl and adjust the seasoning.

MAKES ABOUT 3/4 CUP, ENOUGH FOR 1 POUND PASTA

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Michael's Notes: Don't try to make this pesto in a food processor. The processor just throws it around the bowl. A blender does a much better job. Be sure to thin the pesto with some of the hot pasta water before tossing it with pasta.