FOUR PESTO RECIPES

Make as much as you want.
By Dennis W. Viau; modified from traditional pesto

Pesto doesn't need to be made the same way every time. You can experiment with different combinations of flavors. In this recipe I make traditional pesto with basil, garlic, olive oil, Parmesan cheese (I prefer Romano) and pine nuts. I also make black olive pesto, mint pesto, and fresh herb pesto. I used these to make four roast legs of lamb for my Lazy Man Meals. All were delicious.

**Ingredients:**

**For each kind of pesto:**
- 4 ounces (113g) pine nuts (almonds or roasted pecans can be substituted)
- 2 to 2½ ounces (57g to 71g) fresh basil leaves; stems removed
- 2 to 3 large cloves of garlic
- ½ cup (118ml) olive oil (1 to 1½ cups for a pesto to be used on pasta)
- 1 cup (113g) grated Parmesan or Romano cheese

**For black olive pesto:**
Add about 30 black olives, pitted (I prefer Italian sun dried black olives, which have a strong flavor)

**For mint pesto:**
Add about ½ ounce (14g) of fresh mint leaves

**For herb pesto:**
Add about ½ ounce (14g) of fresh cilantro
½ ounce (14g) of fresh Italian (flat leaf) parsley
1 to 2 tablespoons fresh rosemary needles

**Directions:**

If using pine nuts, place the pine nuts in a skillet over high heat and toast, stirring often, about 2 minutes until they start to take on a golden color. Remove to a bowl to cool. If using almonds or pecans, place in a baking dish and roast in the oven about 10 minutes at 350°F (178°C).

Place the basil leaves, pine nuts, garlic, and any extra ingredients you choose to use, in a sturdy ziplock bag. Press to remove most of the air and seal. Using a smooth mallet, such as a rubber or wooden mallet (a meat tenderizing hammer is okay if it is smooth), hammer the ingredients in the bag until the basil is well crushed. Work carefully so as not to damage the bag.

Place the crushed ingredients in a food processor with the oil and cheese. Blend until smooth.

I use a small amount of oil—½ cup (118ml)—when making pesto to coat a leg of lamb for roasting. I like a sticky pesto to hold to the sides of the lamb. When making pesto for pasta I use more oil to let the pesto drizzle down through the pasta and coat it with all the delicious flavors. You can also toast slices of French bread to make croûtes and spread them with pesto and Brie cheese for a snack or for canapés.

The Step By Step guide begins on the following page.
Here are all my ingredients for four different kinds of pesto. Besides the standard basil, garlic, pine nuts, Parmesan (or Romano) cheese, and olive oil, I also bought some fresh mint, Italian (flat leaf) parsley, and cilantro. I have a rosemary bush in the back yard. So I later added a little rosemary, a tablespoon or two, to the ingredients for the herb pesto.

When making pesto, don’t just chop the basil in a food processor. You end up with chopped basil. To get a really good pesto flavor you need to crush the basil. This releases the juice, which is where all that delicious basil flavor is trapped. Use a mortar and pestle or place the leaves, along with the pine nuts and garlic, in a sturdy plastic bag and hammer the bag with a smooth mallet to crush the leaves.
Here are my ingredients in a ziplock bag, ready for crushing. (These are for the black olive pesto. So you can also see the olives and almonds that I am using rather than pine nuts.)

After crushing the ingredients with a mallet for a few minutes, it will look like this. Don’t hammer the bag to hard; you might break it open and squirt the ingredients all over the place. Work with moderate strength. The leaves won’t looked crushed at first, but keep going. They’ll crush eventually.
Now you are ready for the food processor. Place the crushed ingredients in the bowl. Add the oil and cheese and blend until smooth. Your pesto is ready to use.

Here is my traditional or classic pesto, made for my Pesto Lamb recipe. You’ll notice it isn’t oily. I prefer a stick dry pesto when preparing lamb. For pasta or croûtes, I’d use a more oily pesto.
These are the ingredients I use for my black olive pesto. The olives are Italian, sun dried, purchased in an Italian grocery store located in the city. The basil, by the way, came from a bulk produce store we have in the city. It comes in a 1-pound bag and is very convenient and far less expensive than the basil in the grocery store.

These are my ingredients for making mint pesto. This is also excellent on lamb.
These are the ingredients for herb pesto. Besides the basil, I add fresh Italian (flat leaf) parsley, cilantro, and fresh rosemary from my garden. Again, I am using almonds rather than pine nuts.

Finally, here are four bowls of fresh pesto.

Two legs of boneless lamb, bought at the warehouse store. I removed the elastic wrappings, trimmed away all the fat, and cut each leg in half to make four roasts to be coated inside and out with pesto.
Here are my four roasts. I wrap them in plastic and place them in the refrigerator overnight. This gives the pesto time to flavor the meat. For roasting, remove the plastic but leave the pesto on the lamb.

My roasts, ready for the oven. You can see that I inserted a couple digital thermometer oven probes into the meat. I roast these to about 125°F (52°C) and then remove them from the oven. After resting for about 15 minutes the internal temperature comes up to about 140°F (60°C).

After allowing to cool, I slice all this meat and seal it in little single-serving pouches for my Lazy Man Meals. This is how I like to prepare my Lazy Man Meals, and why I call them Lazy Man Meals. I cook once, and then heat and eat for convenience later. It’s all homemade, but I don’t have all the dishes, pots and pans to wash.

**Conclusion**

Pesto is easy to make. It just takes a little time. Again, for the best pesto crush the basil leaves to release the juices that contain all the flavor. Just chopping them in a food processor isn’t enough.

You can use pesto on meat, fish, pasta, toasted bread (croûtes), and many other ways. If you love pesto, try experimenting with additional herbs and ingredients. My friends who have tasted my black olive pesto actually prefer it over traditional pesto when making a roast lamb.