

Heart Healthy Pesto



The typical ingredients' list for pesto looks something like this:

Pine Nut Pesto:

- Large bunch of fresh basil
- 1 cup pine nuts
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- ½ c olive oil
- Salt & pepper, to taste

The two *Heart Healthy* versions listed below are quite different, but equally delicious. Basil is the main ingredient (and predominant “flavor”) in any pesto. Consequently, “health-tweaking” the other ingredients changes the taste little, while greatly reducing its fat and sodium content. In these *Heart Healthy* versions:

- 1) Lemon juice is substituted for half of the olive oil, greatly reducing the fat content;
- 2) Pine nuts are replaced with pumpkin seeds (or walnuts). While doing this won't reduce the fat content (or calories) of pesto, halving the quantity of nuts/seeds used will [One cup of pine nuts adds 909 calories, 85% of which comes from fat¹. One cup of pumpkin seeds adds 1185 calories, 67.5% comes from fat². One cup of walnuts adds 765 calories, 83.5% comes from fat³.]. The health benefits of all nuts and seeds are numerous, and different. So let cost and availability guide your choice.
- 3) No salt is added, because Parmesan cheese is already very “salty” (1529mg of sodium per cup)⁴. This reduces the sodium content.
- 4) The quantity of Parmesan cheese used is also reduced. Doing this greatly reduces both the sodium (see above) and fat content of the pesto (1 cup of grated Parmesan adds 27g of total fat, of which 17g is saturated fat)⁴. Because it can be added, by any individual, to pesto dishes, it unnecessary to add so much Parmesan cheese to the basic pesto recipe. ENJOY!

1) Pumpkin Seed Pesto:

- 1 c fresh basil, chopped
- ½ cup raw pumpkin seeds, grated
- 2 tsp prepared crushed garlic
- ¼ c cup prepared grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼ c olive oil
- ¼ c lemon juice
- 2 tsp lemon zest (optional)
- Pepper, to taste (optional)

2) Walnut Pesto:

- 1 c fresh basil, chopped
- ½ cup chopped walnuts
- 2 tsp prepared crushed garlic
- ¼ c cup prepared grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼ c olive oil
- ¼ c lemon juice
- 2 tsp lemon zest (optional)
- Pepper, to taste (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Make the pesto: Combine the pine nuts (pumpkin seeds or walnuts), grated Parmesan cheese, and garlic in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Process until the nuts/seeds are finely ground -- about 30 seconds. Add the basil, lemon juice, and lemon zest and pulse in the olive oil until the herbs are chopped and olive oil is just incorporated. Serve immediately, refrigerate for up to two days, or freeze for up to two months until ready to use.

SOURCES

¹ <http://www.nutritiondata.com/facts/nut-and-seed-products/3133/2>

² <http://www.nutritiondata.com/facts/nut-and-seed-products/3067/2>

³ <http://www.nutritiondata.com/facts/nut-and-seed-products/3138/2>

⁴ <http://www.nutritiondata.com/facts/dairy-and-egg-products/31/2>