Food Preservation

Pesto – Preparing and Preserving at Home

UVM Extension Fact Sheet June 2011

Pesto, which has its roots in Italian cuisine, is a thick paste traditionally made from fresh basil, garlic, pine (pignoli) nuts, Parmesan cheese, and olive oil. Pesto literally means “pounded” and was originally made with a mortar and pestle. Pesto can still be made the old fashioned way, but a food processor or blender can make turn the raw ingredients into this aromatic and delicious flavoring agent almost instantly! Pesto is most commonly used to season pasta, but adds wonderful flavor to sauces for chicken or fish, or dips for vegetables or crackers. One can also add pesto to bread dough for a colorful flavor, or use as a spread on crackers, bread, or crostini.

If you are not an ardent basil fan, pesto can be made from spinach, parsley, or other herbs. Other nuts like walnuts or almonds can be substituted for the pine nuts. Let your imagination be your guide for creating different twists on the standard basil-flavored pesto.

Pesto is an uncooked seasoning mixture. It should be made fresh and stored in the refrigerator no more than 3 days. Pesto is a beautiful green when first made, but oxidizes quickly turning dark green to almost brown.

There are no safe home canning recommendations for preserving pesto. The major ingredients in pesto are non-acidic and could support the growth of dangerous disease causing bacteria like *Clostridium botulinum*. Low-acid foods need to be processed in a pressure canner where the internal temperature reaches 240°F. Pesto does not lend itself to heat treatment at such high temperatures and the end product would be unfit to eat. **Freezing** is the only approved process for preserving pesto for home food preservers¹.

Helpful hints for freezing pesto:

- Package amounts of pesto needed for a recipe in freezer-safe jars or plastic freezer containers. Leave ½ inch of headspace. Label with the name of the contents and date. Freeze.
- Pesto can be frozen in ice cube trays or tray freeze small amounts (1-2 tablespoons or amount that you usually use in a recipe) on a plastic wrap lined cookie sheet. Once the pesto is frozen, the cubes can be removed from the ice cube tray or cookie sheet and wrapped individually in plastic wrap and placed in a larger freezer.

¹ [http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/food/nchfp_faq/FAQ_home.php#search](http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/food/nchfp_faq/FAQ_home.php#search)
container or freezer bag. Label package with the contents, date and return to freezer. When you are ready to use pesto, remove only the amount needed for your recipe.

- The “greens” used to make pesto need to be washed and dried before making pesto. Blot the “greens” with paper or cloth dish towels or spin the “greens” in a salad spinner to dry.

Other useful resources:

- Freezing Pesto: http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/freeze/pesto.html
- General Freezing Information: http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/gen_freeze.html

UVM Extension helps individuals and communities put research-based knowledge to work.

Fact sheet prepared by: Dianne Lamb, MEED, UVM Extension Nutrition and Food Specialist, UVM Extension Associate Professor Emerita

Fact sheet reviewed by: Dr. Londa Nwadike, UVM Extension Food Safety Specialist
Londa.nwadike@uvm.edu; tel:802-223-2389; 617 Comstock Road, Berlin, VT 05602

Pesto photo from: http://www.dishinanddishes.com/2009/05/31/pesto-fresh-from-the-garden/

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. University of Vermont Extension, Burlington, Vermont. University of Vermont Extension, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating, offer education and employment to everyone without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status.