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September means it's time for the harvest. The big cornfield down the street has been plowed over and under. Within a few days the field will be filled with geese, making a pit stop to munch stray kernels before continuing their flight south. I still have a few tomatoes to pick and greens to clip for a salad but they'll be eaten up soon. The nights are getting cooler and will soon threaten my herb pots, so it's time to get to work and make pesto.

Basil is the key ingredient in Pesto alla Genovese and most years I am overwhelmed with basil, not so this year. Between the rain and cool weather in June and July, I have but a paltry pot of pewny and puny plants. So I need to bite the bullet and go out and buy some basil or miss out on this fabulous treat.

Making pesto is easy. Historically, people used a mortar and pestle to crush garlic, salt, basil and pine nuts into a thick, creamy paste. Next olive oil and Parmesan cheese were added. If you want to stay true to tradition pull out your mortar and your pestle and have a wonderful afternoon.

However, making pesto is a chance for me to get out one of my favorite gadgets, my handy-dandy mini food processor. I love kitchen tools, gadgets and gizmos and have collected a fair number of them. From mandolins to colorful citrus squeezers to old fashion apple peelers, I may not have it all but I've got a lot! Now when I make pesto, I don't worry too much about tradition. Of all the many kitchen tools I own, surprisingly there is no mortar or pestle. I eye them periodically at the kitchen store but so far ... I just eye them.

But getting back to business, my first step to making pesto is roasting the garlic. Like I said I don't worry about tradition. Roasted garlic is delicious in and of itself but it is also wonderful in pesto. Particularly if you or someone you know has trouble with raw garlic. It's not that I don't love raw garlic but it has a tendency to stick around for awhile; making intimate conversation difficult for a day or three. So I frequently roast my garlic before throwing it in the pesto.

Here's how:

I start by peeling a few or several garlic cloves and put them in a small oven-proof custard cup. Sometimes I smash them or roughly chop them first. Then I cover the cloves with extra virgin olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper (or chili peppers). Next I pop the cup in the toaster oven and bake at 350 degrees for about a half hour or until I remember to take it out. I let the garlic and the oil cool completely.

When the garlic cools, I'm ready to make my pesto. I take a big bunch of basil, remove the leaves from the stems, wash them and dry them. Then I do the same with a small handful of parsley leaves. Adding parsley may be considered heresy in some kitchens but I think it makes a nice addition. In any case, I throw the herbs, roasted garlic and some olive oil in my little food processor and buzz away until everything is smooth. Sometimes I use the roasted garlic-y oil, sometime not. Sometime I add a little vinegar or a shot of lemon juice. The lemon juice is a really nice addition to my shrimp and linguine di pesto alla Genovese.

As you can see the measurements are very exact and the directions exacting! I usually add the herbs in batches because they don't all fit in at once. If you are making a big batch of pesto, you can use a big food processor. I like the little one because it chops everything, including the garlic, very fine. Plus it's easy to clean.

You may be wondering about the pine nuts and Parmesan. If you want to get technical, I actually make what the French call pistou and not pesto. I rarely throw pine nuts or grated Parmesan into the mix ahead of time. Instead, I put a dollop of pesto on my

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pasta and then add freshly toasted pine nuts and sprinkle with freshly grated Parmesan.

So pull out those mortars and pestles or handy-dandy food processors and make some pesto. But don't stop at basil, I make lots of different kinds of pesto from sundried tomato to artichoke to roasted peppers. Why not treat friends and family to a wonderful fall dinner of raviolis with sage pesto? Enjoy!

Bon appétit!

Susan

**Raviolis with Sage Pesto**

*Again, the recipe is as exacting as the measurements exact! Enjoy!*



- Fresh or Frozen Raviolis
- A handful of fresh sage leaves, washed and dried
- A tablespoon or two of fresh thyme leaves, washed and dried
- Roasted garlic to taste
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Chopped and toasted walnuts
- Grated Parmesan cheese

Put the sage, thyme and garlic in a small food processor and process until chopped and blended. Season with salt and pepper and add a little extra virgin olive oil and process until smooth. Slowly add more olive oil until it reaches the desired consistency.

Cook the raviolis according to your recipe's or package directions. Drain the raviolis, reserving a little pasta water. Return the raviolis to the pot and gentle toss with enough sage pesto to coat. If the raviolis seems dry, add a little pasta water or extra virgin olive oil. Sprinkle with toasted walnuts and grated Parmesan cheese and serve.

*Whether you make it with basil or sage, make pesto or pistou, it freezes beautifully. Spoon any extra pesto into ice cube trays, freeze it and then store the pesto cubes in a re-sealable bag. (I figure without the cheese and pine nuts, I save a few inches of space in my already packed freezer.) You'll have fettuccine di pesto in minutes or a great no-fuss garnish for soups throughout the winter.*

