

Spaghettini with Spicy Basil Pesto

Serves 4

Conventionally pesto is made with pine nuts, but here I use pecans, along with a jalapeño, for a distinctive effect. You may want to double or triple the recipe for the pesto. It is very good on grilled fish or meat, as a delicious flavoring for baked potatoes, or as a topping for other pastas. It will keep for up to a week in the refrigerator. Be sure to cover it with a piece of plastic wrap, pressing it down so it touches the surface of the pesto. "Blanching" the basil and parsley in a microwave helps prevent them from discoloring when the pesto is held for a few hours.

PESTO

2 cups packed fresh basil leaves
1 cup tightly packed fresh parsley leaves
¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
¼ cup pecans
5 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
1 small jalapeño pepper, cut in half and seeded
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 pound spaghettini
½ teaspoon salt
Freshly ground black pepper
Hot pepper flakes (optional)
½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Bring 4 quarts of salted water to a boil in a large pot.

MEANWHILE, FOR THE PESTO: Put the basil and parsley in a plastic bag and microwave on high for 1 minute. Transfer, while still hot, to a blender and add the Parmesan cheese, nuts, garlic, and jalapeño pepper. Process for about 30 seconds, until the mixture is finely pureed. Add the oil and process for a few more seconds. (You should have about 1½ cups.) Transfer to a large bowl and set aside.

Add the spaghettini to the boiling water, stir well, and cook for 8 to 9 minutes, until tender but still slightly al dente.

Scoop out 1 cup of the pasta cooking liquid and mix it with the pesto. Drain the pasta well and add it to the sauce, along with the salt, and black pepper to taste. Toss and serve immediately, with hot pepper flakes, if desired, and the grated Parmesan cheese.

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