

Basil Pesto Pasta Salad

Ingredients

- 16 oz bowtie pasta, or another short pasta such as rotini, fusilli, or penne
- 1 cup basil pesto, homemade or store-bought
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes, halved
- 4 cups mixed greens or arugula
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2–3 tablespoons olive oil, as needed
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice (optional)
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Optional Add-Ins

- 1 cup mozzarella pearls
- Grilled chicken
- Crispy bacon
- Toasted pine nuts
- Roasted red peppers
- Extra fresh basil leaves

For the Homemade Basil Pesto

- 2 cups fresh basil leaves, packed
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup pine nuts
- 2 garlic cloves
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil
- 1–2 tablespoons lemon juice
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Instructions

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the pasta according to the package directions until just tender.
2. Drain the pasta, rinse briefly under cold water, and let it cool well.
3. To make homemade pesto, add the basil, Parmesan, pine nuts, garlic, olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and black pepper to a food processor. Blend until mostly smooth, scraping down the sides as needed.
4. Add the cooled pasta to a large mixing bowl. Spoon the basil pesto over the pasta and toss until evenly coated.
5. Add the cherry tomatoes, mixed greens or arugula, and grated Parmesan cheese. Toss gently until combined.
6. Add olive oil as needed if the pasta salad feels dry. Add lemon juice if using, then season with salt and black pepper to taste.
7. Fold in any optional add-ins if using.
8. Serve right away or chill until ready to serve. Toss again before serving.

Note & Storage

- Pine nuts are traditional for basil pesto, but walnuts or almonds can be used as a budget-friendly substitute.
- Pasta absorbs pesto as it sits, so add a little olive oil as needed before serving.
- Let the pasta cool before adding the greens so they stay fresh.
- Lemon juice is optional, but it can brighten the flavor if the pesto tastes rich.
- Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.
- Add the greens right before serving if making ahead.
- Toss before serving because the pesto may settle or absorb into the pasta.