

Pesto *Per Favore!*

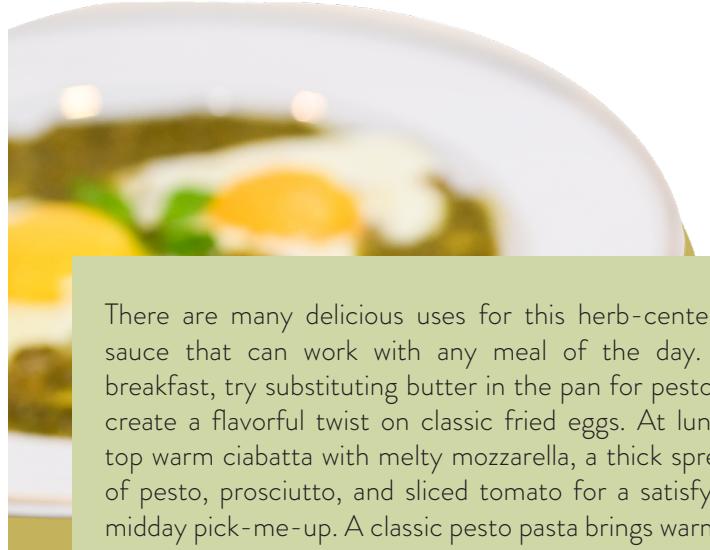
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PHOTOS: Jenny Xiao

My days begin and end with basil. Early mornings are characterized by tending to the sun kissed plant under my living room window. In the evening, I look to its bright, earthy smell for a nostalgia-induced sense of comfort. Basil has been with me throughout my life, garnishing every homemade pasta dish, adorning every Sunday night meat sauce, and holding its own in the form of pesto. Basil as a garnish can breathe a new life into an already complete dish; however, pesto is where the herb truly shines.

Pesto is a simple sauce that originated in Genoa, the capital of Italy's Liguria region in the northwest. It features basil as its key ingredient, though the additions of garlic, pine nuts, olive oil, and parmesan help bring the sauce to new heights. Pesto is traditionally prepared with a mortar and pestle, where the physical act of crushing the basil with its accompanying components releases a stream of vivid herbaceous oils. I see it as the ultimate example of working for your food—and the reward is sincerely worth it. If you don't have a mortar and pestle lying around, a food processor will work just fine.



There are many delicious uses for this herb-centered sauce that can work with any meal of the day. At breakfast, try substituting butter in the pan for pesto to create a flavorful twist on classic fried eggs. At lunch, top warm ciabatta with melty mozzarella, a thick spread of pesto, prosciutto, and sliced tomato for a satisfying midday pick-me-up. A classic pesto pasta brings warmth and comfort to a chilly fall night. It's clear that basil is the core ingredient for pesto; however, there are variations of the Ligurian sauce that feature spinach, kale, walnuts, pistachios, or even sun-dried tomatoes. I'm partial to the classic version, but I encourage you to play around with whatever direction your pesto adventure takes you.

Maintaining a basil plant grants you an endless supply of pesto's main ingredient. The responsibility of keeping up with my plant has given me a newfound sense of purpose as a college student. Since I began caring for it, I've gained more responsibility and control in life, and it has led me to develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world.



Pro tip: when you buy a basil plant from the grocery store, place it in a bowl of water under a sun-facing window for the maximum return on your green investment. Replace the water daily, and watch with amazement as your new herby baby grows to be full and strong.

Making pesto is a wonderful opportunity to honor your basil while spoiling your taste buds. I urge you to search for joy in the simplest of sauces, meals, and moments. Let pesto be your reminder that no matter what may be going on, simplicity can help to create vibrant moments of happiness in the kitchen and beyond.

