

Toasted Pepita Pesto

Cooking is all about making do with what you have. It's about understanding basic techniques and applying them to what's on hand, tweaking and twisting and shaping ingredients into familiar combinations that taste great even when they stray from the classics.

I've made lots of pesto in my time, but this pepita version is my current love. Toasting the seeds releases their oils and deepens their flavor. And here's a tip: buy your pepitas from the bulk bins, just a few cups at a time. Their flavor gets weird if they turn stale, which they'll do if given the opportunity to lounge around.

Finally, I recently had the pleasure to meet Valentina Sofrini, a young, talented Italian blogger whose site [Hortus Natural Cooking](#) is stunningly beautiful. She recently linked to [this video about how to cook pasta properly](#) and serve it up with pesto. I encourage you to follow this method when enjoying the pesto below. I did, and the results were outstanding.

Makes 1-1/4 cups

1 scant cup raw, unsalted pepitas
2-1/4 cups (packed) fresh basil leaves
1 large garlic clove, rough-chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus a bit more for topping off the jar
1/4 cup (packed) shredded parmesan

Toast the pepitas in a dry skillet over medium heat, shaking, until they color in spots and start to sizzle and pop, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate to cool.

In a food processor, grind the basil, garlic, pepitas, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. With the machine on, slowly stream in the 1/2 cup oil through the feed tube. Process until fully emulsified, about 1 minute. Scrape into a medium bowl and stir in the cheese.

To store, pack in a small jar and top off with olive oil. Keep refrigerated, topping off with additional oil as needed to keep the pesto nice and green.