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## Pesto Trapanese

NATURALLY DELICIOUS RECIPES

Janice Feuer-Haugen

### BASIL... *Summer's Perfume*

*"Money can't buy love, but it can buy pesto!"* —Anonymous

Cultivated in India, Asia and Africa for over 5000 years, basil, whose name in Greek means "royal" or "kingly," has also been considered a holy and sacred herb in parts of India and Eastern Europe. In Eastern Orthodox churches basil plants often sit in pots below church altars and basil leaves are used to prepare holy water. In most parts of the world basil is grown as an annual and the summer months are when it is most beautifully green and sweet-smelling—truly summer's perfume. As there are more than 60 varieties of basil—each varying a bit in its volatile oils, taste and appearance—it is found in many regions around the world and plays a major role in the cuisines of Italy, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos.

Besides having a wonderful anise-like flavor and a pungent, sweet smell, basil also has a number of health-protecting benefits based on its flavonoid, volatile oil, vitamin and mineral content. Basil is considered to be an antioxidant thanks to its flavonoids and is anti-bacterial because of its volatile oils. Basil is a very good source of iron and calcium as well as pro-vitamin A due to its concentration of beta-carotene (easily converted into vitamin A) which is essential for cardiovascular health. Basil is also a good source of magnesium, potassium and vitamin C.

Like most Americans, I was first introduced to basil as the star ingredient in the traditional Northern Italian sauce known as "pesto"—a mixture of basil, pine nuts, garlic and parmesan cheese usually tossed with pasta or spread on a pizza. Basil adds bold, fresh and bright flavor along with its perfume. Consider thinly slicing some basil leaves and adding it into your next batch of scrambled eggs or perhaps creating a classic *Insalata Caprese* by alternating whole leaves of basil with sliced tomatoes and fresh mozzarella cheese and then sprinkling with balsamic vinegar and extra-virgin olive oil.

This month I want to share with you a basil recipe for a lesser known yet also boldly-flavored classic Sicilian

pesto from Trapani in western Sicily. Pesto Trapanese features tomatoes and almonds along with the traditional basil and garlic. Fresh and clean flavored and very fast and easy to prepare, Pesto Trapanese is equally wonderful on pasta or *bruschetta* or vegetable pancakes or seafood or even mixed into a steaming bowl of homemade bean or minestrone soup.

Whenever possible, use fresh basil rather than dried for both its perfume and flavor are incomparable when fresh and much milder when dried. When you cook with fresh basil, add it near the end of the cooking process in order to maintain both its maximum flavor and its maximum health benefits. ■

*To your health!* —Janice

## Pesto Trapanese

THE CLASSIC SICILIAN PESTO FROM TRAPANI, ITALY

Yields about 3 1/2 cups

- 1 cup slive red almonds
- 2–3 cloves garlic
- 4–5 plum tomatoes, cored and quartered (to equal 3 1/2 cups)
- 1 cup packed basil leaves
- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Lightly toast the almonds in a 350° oven for about seven minutes. Put aside to cool.

With the food processor running, drop the garlic through the feed tube. When minced add the toasted almonds and pulse until they are finely ground. Add the tomatoes, basil, olive oil, salt and a few twists of freshly ground pepper and process until well blended, leaving it either a little chunky or a fine paste according to your individual taste.

Pesto Trapanese is best the day it is made though it can be stored in the refrigerator for up to a week. The pesto will thicken a bit as it sits.

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