

Asparagus Pesto with Pasta

Dedicated to Lizz Winstead and the entire Abortion Access Front

Credit: Marissa Rothkopf Bates

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Makes 1 1/2 cups pesto, enough for 3/4 pound to 1 pound of pasta

What You'll Need:

1 bunch thick-stemmed asparagus (about 12 large asparagus), ends trimmed

1/2 cup (about 2 ounces) slivered almonds (see notes for substitutions)

1 or 2 garlic cloves, peeled

2 cups (about 5 ounces) spinach, packed

1/2 cup (about 1/2 ounce) flat-leaf parsley

1/2 cup (about 1/2 ounce) Italian basil

3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

zest of one lemon

1/4 teaspoon hot pepper flakes (optional)

1 1/2 ounces grated Parmesan cheese

salt and pepper to taste

16 ounces short pasta, such as casarecce, fusilli or strozzapreti

What You'll Do:

(Please note, this a very easy recipe. Do not be put off by the lengthy instructions. After you've made it once, you'll be able to do it the next time without barely glancing at the recipe.)

1. Fill a large bowl with ice water and set next to the stove.
2. Fill a large saucepan halfway with water. Add a large pinch of salt and bring the water to a simmer. Add the asparagus and blanch for about 3 minutes until the asparagus just turn bright green. They should be tender but not droopy. Drain the spears and immediately place them in the ice water bath to stop the cooking.

3. When the asparagus are cool, remove them to a cutting board and gently pat-a-pat them dry like a little kitten. Cut the spears in half. Slice the pretty top halves on the bias and set aside. Roughly chop the remaining halves into smaller pieces.
4. In a food processor, with the metal blade in place, pulse the garlic and the almonds until coarsely chopped.
5. Add the roughly chopped asparagus, spinach, parsley and basil and pulse 8 to 10 times or until evenly ground. It's the Goldilocks chop you're looking for...not too fine and not too coarse...you want it just right...which is really up to you.
6. With the motor running, add the olive oil slowly through the feed tube. Stop once to scrape down the sides and continue until the pesto is a lush, green emulsification. Mmmm. Emulsification.
7. Place the mixture in a bowl and stir in the lemon zest, pepper flakes (if using), Parmesan cheese and salt and pepper to taste. At this point you can refrigerate the pesto until ready to use (and up to 2 days in advance), or get on with cooking the pasta.
8. I recommend boiling the pasta of your choice in well-salted water. Once it's just tender to the tooth, drain and return to the pot along with a tablespoon or two of butter. Toss the butter and pasta, then add the pesto. Top with the reserved asparagus tips. Taste for salt and pepper and add more if needed. Pass extra Parmesan and red pepper flakes at the table, unless you are some kind of animal who thinks they know the perfect amount of Parmesan their guests need. Enjoy hot or at room temperature.