

Chicken Pesto Pasta

This Chicken Pesto Pasta recipe is an easy, delicious, nutrient-dense meal that the whole family will love.

★★★★★ 5 from 1 vote

Yield: 8 servings

Total Time:

30 mins

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INGREDIENTS

- 16 ounces whole wheat pasta (such as rotini or penne)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 1/2 pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts (diced into bite-sized pieces)
- 2 cups [pesto](#) (recipe below or use store-bought)
- Optional toppings for serving:* cherry tomatoes, roasted red peppers or sun-dried tomatoes, fresh basil leaves, Parmesan or feta cheese

To Make Your Own Pesto:

- 4 cups fresh basil leaves (packed; plus extra for serving)
- 4 cloves garlic (peeled)
- 1/2 cup pine nuts (sub: raw cashews, macadamia nuts, or walnuts)
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese (freshly grated; plus extra for serving)
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- salt and pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

- Cook the Pasta:** Bring a large pot of water to a boil and salt the water generously. (*Tip: While water comes to a boil, move on to the next step.*) Cook the pasta according to package instructions.

Important: Before draining, save 1-2 cups of pasta water in case you need to thin out the pesto sauce. Drain pasta and set aside.

- Saute the Chicken:** In a large skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil over medium-high heat. Once the oil is shimmering, add the chicken and sauté until cooked through (no longer pink),

about 4 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

- 3. Make the Pesto Sauce (*skip if using store-bought pesto*):** In a food processor or high-speed blender, combine the basil, garlic, pine nuts, and Parmesan cheese. Pulse until coarsely chopped. Turn on the food processor and stream in 1 cup olive oil and process until fully incorporated and smooth. Season generously with salt and pepper, to taste.
- 4. Serve:** Gently stir in the pesto, chicken, and optional cherry tomatoes into the pasta. If the pesto sauce is too thick, thin it out with a little of the reserved pasta water. Top with freshly grated Parmesan cheese or crumbled feta and fresh chopped basil, if desired.

NOTES/TIPS

- **About Store-Bought Pesto:** While [Homemade Pesto](#) will always taste better, it's often not feasible year-round. Instead, use about 2 cups store-bought pesto in place of the basil, garlic, pine nuts, Parmesan cheese, and olive oil in our recipe. We suggest buying the refrigerated pesto rather than the jarred kind, if you can find it. If you have choices, read the ingredients and look for one that's closest to our homemade version.
- **Gluten-Free Version:** Simply substitute your favorite gluten-free pasta in this recipe. I really like Banza brand rotini.

NUTRITION

Calories: 518 kcal (26%) | **Carbohydrates:** 36 g (12%) | **Protein:** 27 g (54%) | **Fat:** 28 g (43%) | **Cholesterol:** 59 mg (20%) | **Sodium:** 678 mg (29%) | **Fiber:** 5 g (21%) | **Sugar:** 3 g (3%)

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Author: [Rachel Tiemeyer](#)