

RECIPES

Mexican Style Pesto and Pasta

This dish is from the *nueva cocina mexicana*, or new-style branch of Mexican cooking that combines the soul nourishing earthiness of traditional Mexican cooking with the aesthetic appeal of four-star international restaurant cuisine. I can honestly say that everyone to whom I have served the following Mexican version prefers it to the original Italian versions.

It is made with *cotija* cheese, Mexico's answer to Parmesan, which could be substituted but should not be, as the dish's special flavor will be lost.

Ingredients

1/4 cup raw, hulled pumpkin seeds
1/4 cup pine nuts
2 cups loosely packed, coarsely chopped cilantro
2 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
1 large (or 2 medium) canned chipotle chiles, seeds removed and coarsely chopped
1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste
2 teaspoon black pepper
10 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lime juice
3 ounces (about 1/2 cup) coarsely chopped Mexican *cotija* cheese
12 ounces of fresh angel-hair pasta, or substitute dried
1 avocado, flesh removed and cut into small chunks or slices
Cilantro leaves for garnish
4 or more lime wedges

Directions

1. Make the pumpkin seed garnish. Heat a skillet over medium heat, add the pumpkin seeds and cook until they pop like popcorn. Remove them to a bowl and reserve.

2. Make the pesto. Place the pine nuts, cilantro, garlic, chile(s), salt, pepper, olive oil and lime juice in a food processor and process until they are pureed. With the machine running, add the cheese through the feed tube and continue processing just until it is incorporated into the puree. Reserve 2/3 cup plus 2 tablespoons of the sauce and store the rest in the refrigerator or freezer for future use.

3. Cook the pasta. Bring a large pot of slightly salted water to a boil and cook the pasta until *al dente* (about 1 - 2 minutes for fresh angel hair pasta and much longer for dried).

4. Garnish and serve the pasta. Strain the pasta, return it to the pot, add and toss 2/3 cup of the pesto (reserving the remaining 2 tablespoons) then divide into 4 servings. Top each serving with some pieces of avocado, equal portions of the remaining pesto, and toasted pumpkin seeds. Garnish with some cilantro leaves and serve with the lime wedges on the side.

Serves 4