

The 5 Pesto Challenge winners

There's really no such thing as a "standard" pesto recipe. The only thing standard about pesto is that basil is its primary ingredient, and even so, some people have been known to monkey around with substitute herbs.

But the fourth annual Oh Boy, Basil! Festival in Parma, Mich., was not for such people. It was for people who eat, drink and breathe basil, and the highlight of the day was the Pesto Challenge, a contest ending with the crowning of the Best Pesto

Maker in the Land.

The Best Pesto Maker in the Land was deemed to be Barbara Herman of Fort Wayne, Ind. Her recipe follows. Should you disagree with that designation, try the recipes of one or more of the four runners-up. They represent pestos with enough different consistencies and proportions of liquid, cheese and herbs to suit most tastes. And you may find that the recipe will sauce a different quantity of pasta from the amount indicated; that, of course, is determined by whether your love for pasta exceeds your love for pesto, or vice versa.

The Best Pesto in the Land

- 4 cloves garlic
- ½ cup walnuts
- ½ cup pine nuts
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly cracked white pepper
- 1 cup olive oil
- 4 ounces grated Asiago cheese
- 2 ounces grated aged provolone cheese
- 3 to 4 cups fresh basil leaves

Put garlic, walnuts, pine nuts, salt and pepper in food processor with

(See RECIPES on 4-C)

RECIPES, from 1-C

half the olive oil, and blend down to a paste, about 30 seconds. Add both cheeses and remaining oil and blend for several seconds. Add basil and blend to paste. Makes enough to sauce 1½ to 2 pounds of pasta.

This recipe is from Elda Pieri of Troy, Mich.

The Second-Place Recipe

- 2 cups basil
- 1 cup parsley
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 cups grated Pecorino or Romano cheese
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup whipping cream

In a mortar, crush basil, parsley, garlic and cheese, adding a little of the oil during the process. When it is reduced to paste, remove to bowl and add remaining oil and whipping cream. Stir and blend together. Makes enough to sauce about one pound of pasta.

The third-place winner was Jeff Lindau of Birmingham, Mich.

The Third-Place Recipe

- 1 cup toasted pine nuts
- 2 cloves garlic
- Juice of ½ lemon
- Juice of ½ lime
- 1 cup Romano cheese, grated
- 1 cup Asiago cheese, grated
- Grated lemon peel to taste
- Grated lime peel to taste
- ½ pound sweet basil
- ¾ cup olive oil

Put nuts and garlic in food processor with lemon and lime juices, and process to paste. Add Romano and Asiago cheeses, grated lemon and lime peel, basil and olive oil, and blend. Makes enough to sauce 1 to 1½ pounds of pasta.

Cecilia Gersonde of Battle Creek, Mich., won fourth place with this recipe.

The Fourth-Place Recipe

- 2 cups basil

- 2 tablespoons pine nuts
- 1 to 1½ cups extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons coarse pepper
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese

Put basil, pine nuts, olive oil, salt and pepper into blender. Process, then fold in cheese. Makes enough to sauce one pound of pasta.

This recipe for Pesto Genovese won fifth place. It was submitted by Tom Cherniak of Rochester, Minn.

The Fifth-Place Recipe

- 1 cup fresh basil leaves
- 4 spinach leaves
- 6 sprigs marjoram
- ½ cup pine nuts
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ½ cup grated Romano cheese
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Blend all ingredients briefly in blender or food processor. Makes enough to sauce one-half pound of pasta.