

# Pesto Pantesco ("Pesto From Pantelleria")

Excerpted with permission from *Food of the Italian Islands* by Katie Parla.

Certain brand names become eponymous with the products or foods they represent. Even in this new era of heightened awareness of regional cuisines, the word “pesto” has met a similar fate, becoming synonymous with a specific version: pesto alla genovese, a blend of basil, pine nuts, garlic, olive oil, and grated cheese. But pesto isn't defined by a single city's tradition, and it's not unique to northwestern Italy. It can be any pasta sauce made by mashing together ingredients in a mortar and pestle (or blending them in food processor) and is typically composed of herbs, nuts, cheese, and olive oil.

If there's a pesto capital of Italy, it's Sicily, where Trapani and the islands of Linosa and Pantelleria, not to mention the Aeolian chain, all have their own versions. Pesto pantesco embraces the wonderful, savory flavor of Pantelleria's most famous export, salted capers.

*Makes 3 cups pesto, to serve 4 to 6*

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound Roma (plum) tomatoes, blanched and peeled, then roughly chopped
- 1 cup blanched almonds, roughly chopped
- 3 tablespoons salted capers, rinsed, soaked until their saltiness mellows, then drained
- Leaves from 1 bunch basil (about 1 packed cup)
- Leaves from 1 bunch mint (about 1 packed cup)
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- Fine sea salt
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 pound dried or fresh pasta

## DIRECTIONS

1. Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil over high heat.
2. Meanwhile, in a food processor, combine all the ingredients except the olive oil, cheese (if the recipe calls for it), and pasta, then pulse until chunky. Slowly add the olive oil and process until smooth.
3. Transfer the pesto to a large bowl. Stir in the cheese, if using.
4. When the water comes to a boil, add salt until it tastes like a seasoned soup. Add the pasta and cook until al dente (see page 28) if it's dried, or cook until it floats and loses its raw flavor if it's fresh.
5. Drain the pasta, reserving some of the cooking water. Add the pasta to the pesto and stir to coat. Add some of the reserved pasta cooking water a spoonful at a time as needed to loosen the sauce. Season with salt to taste.
6. Serve.