

LEITE'S CULINARIA



Bucatini with Nettle-Pecan Pesto

by Jess Thomson

Serves 2 to 4

Though their flavor is often compared to spinach, the thickness and texture of nettle leaves make them a better candidate for the kind of coarse pesto that clings to high-quality pasta. Spread the leftover on sandwiches, swirl it into aioli as a dip for artichoke leaves, or thin it with a little additional olive oil and use it as a pizza sauce.

INGREDIENTS

For the pesto

1/2 pound nettles
3 large garlic cloves, smashed
1/2 cup toasted pecans
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
Freshly ground pepper
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

For the pasta

1/2 pound high-quality bucatini or thick spaghetti
1/3 cup panko breadcrumbs
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for garnish

METHOD

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a simmer for the nettles. Add the nettles directly from their bag and cook, stirring continuously, for 2 minutes. Dump into a colander to drain. When the nettles are cool enough to handle, wrap them in a clean dishtowel and wring out as much moisture as possible. You'll have about a cup of cooked, squished nettles.
2. Pulse the garlic, pecans, salt, and a few grindings of pepper in a food processor until finely chopped. Add the nettles, breaking them up as you go, and the lemon juice and whirl until the nettles are finely chopped. With the machine running, add the olive oil in a slow, steady stream through the feed tube. Add the cheese, pulse a few times, and season to taste with additional salt, pepper, and lemon juice, if needed.
3. Cook the pasta until al dente, according to package directions. Meanwhile, heat a small skillet over medium-high heat. Add the breadcrumbs and toast for a minute or two, stirring frequently, until the crumbs are golden brown. Transfer to a small bowl and set aside.
4. When the pasta is done, reserve a cupful of the cooking water, then strain. Return the pasta to the pot and mix with a heaping 1/2 cup of nettle pesto and about 1/4 cup (more or less) of the pasta water. Stir in the breadcrumbs and the 2 tablespoons Parmesan, and serve immediately, sprinkled with additional cheese.

Variations

Instead of toasted pecans, try toasted walnuts.

For a spicy pesto, sauté 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes in 1 tablespoon of the olive oil, until fragrant. Cool, then add to the pesto with the rest of the oil.

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