

White Beans with Pesto

By MARTHA ROSE SHULMAN

Use pistou made with basil for this [salad](#), or one of the more unusual pestos, like arugula pesto or chermoula. The pesto will contrast beautifully with the creamy flavor of the beans.

2 cups dried white beans, picked over and soaked for four to six hours, or 3 cans white beans, drained and rinsed

1 onion cut in half

2 garlic cloves, minced

1 bay leaf

Salt to taste

1/2 cup [pistou](#), [arugula pesto](#) (made without the pine nuts or walnuts) or [chermoula](#)

1. Drain the beans, and place in a pot with 2 quarts water, the onion, garlic and bay leaf. Bring to a gentle boil, reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer one hour. Add salt to taste, and simmer for another 30 minutes to an hour until the beans are soft and fragrant. Remove the onion and the bay leaf, and drain the beans through a colander set over a bowl.

2. Return the beans to the pot with some of the broth, and stir in the pistou, pesto or chermoula. Thin out as desired with the broth from the beans. If using canned beans, use a little warm water to thin out the pesto if desired. Serve warm or room temperature.

Yield: Serves six.

Pistou

2 cups basil leaves

2 garlic cloves, blanched if desired

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 ounce Parmesan, freshly grated (1/4 cup tightly packed)

Grind the basil leaves to a paste in a mortar and pestle with 1/4 teaspoon salt. Remove from the mortar and pestle, and place the garlic and the remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt in the mortar. Grind the garlic to a paste. Return the ground basil and slowly work in the olive oil. Stir in the Parmesan.

Alternatively, place all of the ingredients except the Parmesan in a food processor fitted with the steel blade or a blender, and blend until smooth. Stir in the Parmesan.

Arugula Pesto

In addition to serving this vibrant pesto with pasta, I use it with grains — risottos made with rice, barley, or wheat — and as a topping for tomatoes. It's great on its own, spooned onto a thick slice of country bread. Don't use a sharp olive oil with this, or it will overwhelm the arugula.

2 garlic cloves, cut in half, green shoots removed

2 heaped tablespoons shelled walnuts

4 ounces arugula, stemmed, washed and dried (2 cups leaves, tightly packed)

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/3 to 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil, as needed

1/3 to 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan, to taste

1. Turn on a food processor fitted with the steel blade, and drop in the garlic cloves. When they are chopped and adhering to the sides, stop the machine, scrape down the sides of the bowl and add the walnuts. Turn on the machine, and process until they are finely ground. Scrape down the bowl again, and add the arugula and the salt. [Pulse](#) until the arugula is finely chopped, then turn on the machine and run while you slowly drizzle in the olive oil. When the mixture is smooth, stop the machine, scrape down the sides and process for another 30 seconds or so. Scrape out into the bowl of a mortar and pestle. Grind the mixture with the pestle for a smoother texture. Work in the [cheese](#) and combine well.

Yield: Makes about 2/3 cup.