

Asparagus Pesto with Pasta

1 bunch asparagus spears (about 1 lb), trimmed of tough ends and halved crosswise
3 handfuls baby spinach leaves
2 cloves garlic, peeled
1 C grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for topping
1 C pine nuts
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for topping
Juice of 1/2 lemon
1/2 t fine-grain sea salt
Pinch red pepper or to taste
8 ounces of dried pasta or 12 ounces fresh -linguini, fettuccini

Bring 2 pots of water to a rolling boil, one large for the pasta and one medium sized for the asparagus. While the water is heating, put the pine nuts in a single layer in a large skillet. Heat on medium heat, stirring occasionally, until fragrant and lightly browned. Remove pine nuts from pan and set aside. You will use 3/4 cup of the pine nuts for the pesto paste and 1/4 cup to mix in whole. Salt the asparagus water and drop the spears into the pan. Cook for only 2 or 3 minutes, until the spears are bright green and barely tender. Drain under cool water to stop the cooking. Cut the tips off, and set aside, several of the asparagus (diagonal cut about an inch from the end) to use for garnish. Add the asparagus, spinach, garlic, Parmesan, and 3/4 cup of the pine nuts to a food processor. Purée and, with the motor running, drizzle in the 1/4 cup of olive oil until a paste forms. If too thick, thin it with a bit of the pasta water. Add the lemon juice and salt, taste and adjust seasoning.

Cook the pasta according to the directions on the packet. Remember, you'll need more time for dried pasta and less for fresh. Drain and toss immediately with 1 cup of the asparagus pesto. Serve sprinkled with the remaining 1/4 cup toasted pine nuts, a dusting of Parmesan, and a light drizzle of olive oil.

Serves 4 to 6.