Pesto

BASIL WALNUT

- 4 cloves garlic
- 2/3 cup toasted* walnuts (toasted pecans, hazelnuts, sunflower seeds or traditional pine nuts may be used in place of walnuts)
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 3 cups fresh basil leaves removed from stem
- 1 teaspoon salt

Combine all ingredients in food processor. Blend until well mixed.

Makes 2 cups

CILANTRO PECAN

- 3 cups cilantro leaves and stems
- 4 cloves garlic
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups toasted* pecans or almonds
- 1/3 cup olive oil

Combine all of the ingredients in a food processor and blend until smooth. Refrigerate until needed.

Makes 2 cups

*Toasting Nuts

Toasting brings out a deeper and richer flavor to nuts. There are two ways to toast nuts—in the skillet or oven. First, make certain the nuts are shelled and of uniform size.

You can toast nuts in a heavy skillet over a medium flame until they start to turn golden or brown, turn constantly so they don’t scorch. This usually takes 5 to 7 minutes. Toast only one layer of nuts over the bottom of the skillet at one time. You’ll begin to notice an almost sweet caramel fragrance from the nuts when they’re ready. If you are careful and attentive, you can get the nuts very well toasted and bring out their wonderful aroma with a slow, medium heat. Be careful not to let them sit without moving or they will burn.

You can also toast the nuts in the oven. Take a shallow baking pan and spread the nuts out in an even layer. Roast the nuts at 400 degrees for about 10 minutes, stirring and turning after 5 minutes.

Since nuts contain their own oil, there is no need to add any when toasting. This is also true when preparing nut butters. The natural oils that are released when toasted help to break down the nuts into delicious, creamy nut butter. Simply grind them in a food processor (a coffee or spice grinder will work for smaller quantities as well) until they become creamy—usually about 3-5 minutes. You may need to stop and scrape the bowl once or twice. Add salt if desired. 2 cups nuts will yield about 1 cup nut butter. You can combine different nuts for fantastic flavors—my favorites are almond-pecan and cashew-walnut.

To have a ready supply of toasted nuts at hand, toast a large quantity at the same time and store what you don’t use in an air-tight jar. These can be stored on the shelf for up to 2 months, or in the freezer (I use heavy duty freezer bags) for up to 6 months.