

Spaghetti with Fresh Peas and Lemony Nettle Pesto

Stinging nettles are delicious edible weeds with a layer of prickly hairs on the sunny side of each leaf. They will sting if you touch them raw—but cooking them denatures the sting, rendering them perfect fodder for a springtime pesto. Add chopped grilled chicken, if you're looking for a bit more heft.

Active time: 20 minutes

Serves 4

1/2 pound fresh nettles
2 large garlic cloves, finely chopped
1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
2 teaspoons lemon zest
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for garnish
1/2 pound spaghetti
1 cup fresh peas

Bring a large pot of water to boil for the nettles. Dump them into the water (don't touch them!) and cook for 2 minutes, stirring. Drain in a colander, then squeeze as dry as possible, using a kitchen towel to wring out extra water, if necessary. (You should have about a cup of nettles.)

Whirl the nettles, garlic, pine nuts, salt, lemon zest, and lemon juice in a food processor until smooth. With the machine on, add the oil in a slow, steady stream, whirling until combined. Pulse in the cheese, then season to taste. Set aside.

Cook the pasta until al dente, according to package directions, adding the peas to the cooking water about 3 minutes before the pasta is done. Reserve a cupful of the cooking water.

Strain the peas and pasta, then return them to the pot, along with 1/2 cup of the pesto and about 1/4 cup of the cooking water (you may need more or less, depending on how loose you like your pasta sauce).

Serve immediately, sprinkled with additional cheese.