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Preparations underway for making the Grosso family pesto recipe, which they traditionally serve on Good Friday (NCR photo/John Grosso)



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This recipe is part of a Lent 2025 series where National Catholic Reporter staff will share some of their favorite meatless meals. Sign up for the EarthBeat Reflections email newsletter to receive future series similar to this one.



When I first learned how to cook, I would never deviate from a recipe. In fact, I wouldn't even attempt cooking a meal unless it had a set of step-by-step instructions and exact measurements.

As I became a more confident chef, I attempted to recreate some of the traditions of my childhood — my great grandma's shortbread cookies for Christmas, my uncle's barbecue ribs for the summer and, eventually, my mom's legendary pesto that she would make for Good Friday.

Imagine my terror when I asked her to teach me and she said, "Well, I never measure anything. I just know!"

"How do you make it creamy?" I asked.

"You just eyeball it while pouring in the olive oil," she said.

"How much basil should I buy?" I asked.

"A lot," she shrugged.



The Grosso family pesto sauce prepared in a bowl (NCR photo/John Grosso)

"How do you know if there's too much garlic?"

"There's no such thing," she laughed.

After many years of trial and error, and one supervised cooking experience with my mom, I finally was able to get it right. Both my mom and I make this recipe throughout the year (It's particularly good in mid-August as the basil reaches peak growth), but when I eat it I am always transported back to my mom's kitchen on Good Friday at about 5 p.m., right after church.

And though it will never be quite as good as my mom's, I can confidently share with you our family pesto recipe — which is both my wife's and my daughter's favorite thing that I make.

Grosso Pesto

Servings — 4 per pound of pasta

Time — 30-40 minutes

Ingredients

All ingredients can be adjusted according to your taste. Pine nuts can be swapped out for walnuts in a pinch, but I implore you to avoid doing so! Do not add lemon juice.

- 4 bunches of fresh basil, washed
- 4 cloves of garlic
- 1/2 cup of toasted pine nuts
- 1/4-1/2 cup of pecorino romano cheese
- 1/2 cup of extra virgin olive oil (more for a creamier pesto)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 box of rigatoni pasta (more if you are serving a larger group)

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Instructions

1. Bring a pot of lightly salted water to boil. Cook and drain pasta, then set aside.
2. Wash and de-stem basil leaves. Peel garlic.
3. In a food processor, combine pine nuts, garlic, basil, salt, pepper, pecorino romano cheese and olive oil. Pulse until chopped and mixed.
4. Drizzle in more olive oil until the pesto reaches desired consistency. (Ideally, you want it nice and smooth.)
5. Test and adjust seasonings as needed, pulsing until well combined.
6. Once the pasta has cooled a bit, add in your pesto and mix well.
7. Serve and enjoy!

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This story appears in the **Our Daily Bread** and **Lent 2025** feature series.