

Basil Lemon Pasta Salad – Quick 15-Minute Recipe

Need a recipe that's incredibly fast and tastes amazing? This **Basil Lemon Pasta Salad** is your new secret weapon. We're talking 15 minutes of active prep and cook time. That's it. You get a delicious, zesty, and light pasta salad on the table (or packed for lunch) with almost zero effort. Forget complicated recipes. This quick 15-minute recipe uses simple pantry staples to create a side dish that everyone will ask for. This is the perfect solution for last-minute potlucks, busy weeknight dinners, or a healthy lunch prep for the week. Let's get started.

Why This Basil Lemon Pasta Salad is a Weeknight Winner

Minimal Ingredients, Maximum Flavor

This recipe is the definition of "less is more." You do not need a long list of expensive or hard-to-find ingredients to create a spectacular dish. This **Basil Lemon Pasta Salad** relies on a few powerful, fresh components. The combination of zesty lemon, sharp parmesan, and peppery fresh basil creates a complex flavor profile that tastes like it took hours to develop. The toasted pine nuts add a sophisticated, buttery crunch that elevates the entire salad. Because the ingredient list is so short and simple, it's easy to keep these items on hand. Consequently, you can whip up this amazing side dish any time you need it.

The "15-Minute" Promise: How It Works

We call this a "Quick 15-Minute Recipe" because the active time you spend in the kitchen is genuinely minimal. The 15 minutes (or 17, to be precise) breaks down perfectly. You'll spend about 2-3 minutes getting your water on the boil and chopping your basil. The pasta itself cooks in about 10-12 minutes. While the pasta is boiling, you use that time efficiently. You'll make the dressing (which takes 60 seconds) and toast the pine nuts (about 3 minutes). As soon as the pasta is done, you drain it, rinse it, and toss everything together. The "hands-on" time is finished. The 2-hour refrigeration is passive time, meaning you can go do something else while the salad marinates.

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- Author: [Aaron recipes](#)
- Total Time: **17**
- Yield: **12 servings 1x**
- Diet: [Vegetarian](#)

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Description

A quick and refreshing basil lemon pasta salad. This 15-minute recipe features a zesty lemon dressing, fresh basil, and crunchy pine nuts, perfect for a summer side dish or light lunch.

Ingredients

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Scale

1x

2x

3x

- ☐ 1 pound pasta {shown with campanelle}
 - ☐ 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
 - ☐ 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
 - ☐ 3 tablespoons lemon juice
 - ☐ 8 cracks black pepper or to taste
 - ☐ ? cup pine nuts
 - ☐ 1/2 cup parmesan shavings
 - ☐ 1/4 cup fresh basil sliced thin
 - ☐ Cook Mode Prevent your screen from going dark
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Instructions

1. In a large pot of salty water, bring noodles to a boil and prepare al dente. Drain and rinse with cold water to shock pasta.
2. Meanwhile, combine white wine vinegar, olive oil, and lemon juice in a jar and shake well.
3. In a large bowl toss pasta with dressing and pine nuts. Add fresh cracked pepper, basil and parmesan flakes.
4. Refrigerate 2+ hours before serving.

Notes

Storage: Store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 3-4 days. If the pasta seems dry, refresh it with an extra drizzle of olive oil and a squeeze of lemon juice.

Variations: Use walnuts or toasted almonds instead of pine nuts. Add chickpeas or shredded rotisserie chicken for extra protein. Use any short pasta like fusilli, bow tie, or penne.

Tips: Prepare noodles al dente to prevent them from getting mushy. Shocking the pasta with cold water is essential to stop the cooking and prevent clumping.

- Prep Time: 5
- Cook Time: 12
- Category: Side Dish, Salad, Lunch
- Method: Boiling, Mixing
- Cuisine: American, Mediterranean

Nutrition

- **Serving Size:** approx 1 cup
- **Calories:** 212
- **Sugar:** 1g
- **Sodium:** 35mg
- **Fat:** 9g
- **Protein:** 7g

Did you make this recipe?

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The Core Components Explained

Choosing Your Noodle Wisely (Pasta Substitutions)

The recipe shows campanelle, which is a great choice. Its cone shape and ruffled edge are fantastic for catching the dressing. However, you absolutely do not need to hunt for this specific pasta. This **Basil Lemon Pasta Salad** is incredibly forgiving. The most important rule is to use a short pasta shape. Good substitutions include bow tie (farfalle), spirals (fusilli), or corkscrews (cavatappi). Even basic penne or rotini will work perfectly. The goal is to have bite-sized pieces that are easy to mix and eat. Avoid long noodles like spaghetti or fettuccine, as they will clump and be difficult to serve. Use whatever short pasta you have in your pantry; it will be delicious.

Fresh vs. Bottled: Lemon Juice and Basil

For a quick 15-minute recipe, it can be tempting to reach for bottled lemon juice or dried basil. We strongly suggest you use fresh ingredients if at all possible. Because there are so few ingredients, the quality of each one shines through. Bottled lemon juice often has preservatives that give it a

dull or slightly “off” flavor. A single fresh lemon will provide all the juice you need and a much brighter, zestier taste. The same is true for basil. Dried basil has a very different, muted flavor profile. Fresh basil provides that signature peppery, aromatic quality that makes the salad taste like summer. These two fresh ingredients are the key to taking this salad from “good” to “unforgettable.”

The Easiest Dressing You’ll Ever Make

The Simple Jar Shake Method

You do not need a blender, a food processor, or even a whisk to make this dressing. The single best tool is a simple jar with a tight-fitting lid. A small mason jar, an old jam jar, or even a tupperware container will work. Just add the white wine vinegar, extra virgin olive oil, and lemon juice to the jar, seal the lid, and shake it vigorously for about 15 seconds. This method is faster than whisking and actually creates a better, more stable temporary emulsion. The dressing will become cloudy and slightly thickened, which helps it cling to every noodle. Plus, cleanup is a breeze. This technique is a perfect shortcut for any quick recipe.

Oil and Vinegar Choices

This **Basil Lemon Pasta Salad** is very flexible. The recipe calls for extra virgin olive oil and white wine vinegar, which create a classic, smooth, and slightly fruity dressing. However, if you don’t have those, you can easily substitute. You could use a regular olive oil or even a neutral-tasting oil like canola or vegetable oil. If you use a neutral oil, the lemon and basil flavors will just be more pronounced. For the vinegar, you could substitute champagne vinegar or apple cider vinegar for a slightly different (but still delicious) tangy flavor. We would avoid using plain distilled white vinegar, as its flavor is very sharp and can be overwhelming in this simple preparation.

Pro-Tips for Pasta Salad Perfection

Don’t Overcook the Pasta!

This is the most important rule for any pasta salad. You must cook your pasta “al dente,” which means it should still have a firm bite in the center. Check the package directions for the al dente cooking time, and start testing it a minute *before* it’s supposed to be done. The reason this is so crucial is that the pasta will continue to soften as it soaks in the vinaigrette. If you cook it until it’s perfectly soft to begin with, it will become mushy and fall apart after it marinates in the dressing for a couple of hours. A firm al dente texture ensures your finished **Basil Lemon Pasta Salad** has the perfect, pleasing chew.

The “Cold Water Shock” Technique

Immediately after your pasta is done cooking, you must drain it and rinse it under cold running water. This is called “shocking” the pasta. This step does two essential things at once. First, it instantly stops the cooking process, guaranteeing your pasta stays perfectly al dente and doesn’t become overcooked from its own residual heat. Second, it washes away the excess starches from the surface of the noodles. This starch is what makes pasta stick together in a big, gummy clump as it cools. By rinsing it away, you ensure that every noodle stays separate, slippery, and ready to be coated evenly by your delicious lemon vinaigrette.

Variations and Serving Suggestions

Nut Alternatives (Walnuts, Almonds)

Pine nuts add a wonderful, buttery crunch, but they can also be expensive or hard to find. Don't let that stop you from making this recipe. You can easily substitute them with other nuts. Toasted walnuts, roughly chopped, are a fantastic alternative. They provide a similar richness and a great, hearty texture. Sliced or slivered almonds, also toasted, are another excellent choice. They add a delicate, nutty flavor and a satisfying crunch. If you have a nut allergy, you can try using toasted sunflower seeds or pepitas (pumpkin seeds). Or, you can simply leave the nuts out entirely. The salad will still be delicious.

Making It a Full Meal

This **Basil Lemon Pasta Salad** is a rockstar side dish, but it can easily become the main event with a few simple additions. To make it a more substantial meal, toss in a can of drained and rinsed chickpeas for added protein and fiber. Shredded rotisserie chicken is another fantastic and fast mix-in. For a vegetarian option, small cubes of fresh mozzarella or crumbled feta cheese would be delicious. You could also serve it over a bed of fresh arugula or spinach to turn it into a "pasta salad salad." This dish is fantastic alongside grilled chicken, but you can also add chickpeas or shredded rotisserie chicken directly to the bowl. If you want another great option for a speedy summer meal, check out our **Mediterranean pasta salad quick summer 2025 recipe**.

Easy Ingredient Substitutions

This recipe is very flexible. Here are some common and easy swaps based on what you have in your pantry.

Ingredient Recommended		Easy Substitutions
Pasta	Campanelle	Fusilli, Bow Tie (Farfalle), Penne, Cavatappi
Nuts	Pine Nuts	Walnuts (toasted), Sliced Almonds (toasted)
Oil	Extra Virgin Olive Oil	Regular Olive Oil, Canola Oil, Vegetable Oil
Vinegar	White Wine Vinegar	Champagne Vinegar, Apple Cider Vinegar
Cheese	Parmesan Shavings	Grated Parmesan, Pecorino Romano
Herb	Fresh Basil	Fresh Parsley (different flavor, but still good)

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I add protein to this basil lemon pasta salad?

Yes! This salad is a great base for protein. For a quick addition, toss in a can of drained chickpeas, some shredded rotisserie chicken, or even a can of tuna. If you have more time, it's delicious topped with grilled shrimp or salmon.

Why did my pasta salad get dry after sitting in the fridge?

This is very normal. Pasta is starchy and acts like a sponge, so it will continue to absorb the dressing as it sits. To fix this, simply add an extra drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and a fresh squeeze of lemon juice right before serving. Toss it well, and it will be as good as new.

Is it okay to use dried basil instead of fresh?

While fresh basil is highly recommended for its bright, aromatic flavor, you can use dried basil in a pinch. The general rule is to use one-third the amount of dried herbs as you would fresh. For this recipe, start with 1.5 to 2 teaspoons of dried basil. It will still be tasty, but the flavor will be more subtle and less “summery.”

Conclusion

This **Basil Lemon Pasta Salad** is the ultimate quick 15-minute recipe for anyone who needs a delicious, fresh dish without the fuss. It’s the perfect combination of simple, high-quality ingredients that come together in minutes. Because it’s served cold and tastes even better after marinating, it is the ideal make-ahead solution for parties, potlucks, and weekly meal prep. This light, zesty, and satisfying salad is proof that you don’t need to spend hours in the kitchen to create something truly special. We’re confident this will become your new go-to fast recipe.

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