

Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad – Perfect Summer Potluck

Get ready to win the “best dish” award at your next gathering with this **Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad**. This is the ultimate summer potluck recipe. It’s vibrant, incredibly flavorful, and packed with ingredients everyone loves. We’re talking tender, cheese-stuffed tortellini tossed in a savory pesto sauce. Then, we mix in creamy mozzarella pearls, zesty sun-dried tomatoes, and tangy artichoke hearts. This salad is not only delicious but also travels exceptionally well. Consequently, it’s the perfect make-ahead solution for any barbecue, party, or picnic. Prepare for an empty bowl; this is the crowd-pleaser you’ve been looking for.

The Anatomy of a Crowd-Pleasing Potluck Dish

Why Tortellini Beats Regular Pasta for Parties

For any potluck or gathering, this **Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad** has a secret weapon: the tortellini. Unlike standard rotini or penne, tortellini are little pillows of cheesy goodness. Each bite provides an extra burst of flavor and a satisfying, chewy texture. This instantly elevates the dish from a simple “pasta salad” to a more hearty and gourmet-feeling main or side. Furthermore, tortellini holds its shape beautifully, even when made ahead. This ensures your salad looks just as good on the buffet table as it did in your kitchen.

Balancing Rich Pesto with Bright, Zesty Ingredients

The key to a successful pasta salad is balance. Pesto is rich, nutty, and savory. To make it potluck-perfect, you must balance that richness with bright, acidic, and fresh elements. That’s where the other ingredients shine. The sun-dried tomatoes provide a concentrated, sweet-and-tangy punch. The artichoke hearts offer a mild, briny flavor that cuts through the oil. Finally, the fresh basil and sharp red onion lift the entire dish, preventing it from tasting heavy. This careful balance makes it refreshing, even on a hot summer day.

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No reviews

- Author: [Aaron recipes](#)
- Total Time: **15**
- Yield: **6 servings 1x**

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Description

An easy & delicious pesto tortellini pasta salad! Pillow soft cheese tortellini are tossed with sun-dried tomatoes, artichokes, fresh mozzarella & parmesan then coated in mouth-watering pesto! Perfect for summer parties, potlucks or serve as a light dinner!

Ingredients

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Scale

- ☐ 20 oz. cheese tortellini, dry
 - ☐ 8 oz. fresh mozzarella pearls
 - ☐ 1 (14 oz.) can quartered artichoke hearts, drained & chopped
 - ☐ ½ cup julienned sun-dried tomatoes (packed in oil)
 - ☐ ? cup shredded parmesan (plus more for garnish)
 - ☐ ? cup fresh basil, sliced
 - ☐ ¼ cup red onion, thinly sliced
 - ☐ ½–¾ cup pesto (homemade or store bought)
 - ☐ Cracked black pepper, to taste
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Instructions

1. Cook the tortellini. Boil the tortellini according to the package's directions. Then drain them using a colander and run the tortellini under cold water to cool. Set them aside to cool completely.
2. Toss. Once the tortellini are cool, add them to a large bowl with the mozzarella pearls, chopped artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes, shredded parmesan, fresh basil and red onion.
3. Pour your desired amount of pesto over the top and toss until the salad is coated to your liking. Season with cracked black pepper and toss again. (At this point you can cover the salad and keep it chilled in the refrigerator for 30 minutes before serving.)

4. Serve. Serve each bowl with extra shredded parmesan cheese and fresh basil sprinkled over the top (if desired).

Notes

The amounts listed for the ingredients are suggested amounts. If you prefer more or less of an ingredient, please feel free to alter the recipe to your liking.

Try a homemade kale pesto – It's loaded with nutrient dense ingredients & has the BEST flavor!

- Prep Time: 10
- Cook Time: 5
- Category: Main Course
- Cuisine: American

Did you make this recipe?

Share a photo and tag us-we can't wait to see what you've made!

Choosing Your Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad All-Stars

Homemade vs. Store-Bought Pesto: Does it Matter?

Let's be honest: for a potluck, convenience is king. A high-quality store-bought pesto is a fantastic time-saver and delivers consistent, delicious results. Look for one in the refrigerated section, as they often have a fresher, brighter flavor than jarred varieties. However, if you have a flourishing basil plant, making your own pesto takes just five minutes in a food processor. Homemade pesto allows you to control the garlic, salt, and nut ratio. Ultimately, both options work wonderfully. The best choice is the one that gets this delicious **Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad** on the table with the least stress.

The Cheese Factor: Mozzarella and Parmesan

This salad uses a powerful one-two punch of cheese. First, the fresh mozzarella pearls. These are essential for texture. They provide little bursts of cool, creamy relief against the zesty pesto. Avoid using cubed low-moisture mozzarella, as it can be rubbery. The "pearl" or *ciliegine* size is perfect for integrating into the salad. Second, the shredded parmesan. This adds a sharp, nutty, and salty flavor that deepens the savory notes of the pesto. It's a non-negotiable ingredient for that classic Italian-American flavor profile.

How to Build the Best Potluck Pasta Salad

The Secret to Non-Mushy Tortellini

The number one rule for any pasta salad is to avoid mushy pasta. This is especially true for tortellini. Your first step is to cook the pasta in generously salted water. Follow the package directions, but aim for the lower end of the time range. You want the tortellini to be *al dente* (firm to the bite). The moment it's done, drain it and rinse it thoroughly with cold water. This cold shock does two things: it halts the cooking process instantly, and it rinses off the starches that cause clumping. Let it drain completely before dressing it.

Layering Flavors for the Perfect Bite

A great **Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad** isn't just tossed; it's built. Start with your large bowl and the completely cooled tortellini. Add all the mix-ins: the mozzarella, artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes, parmesan, basil, and red onion. Now, add the pesto. Start with about half a cup. Toss gently but thoroughly, ensuring everything is lightly coated. Then, add more pesto, a bit at a time, until you reach your desired level of sauciness. Finally, season with cracked black pepper. This method ensures every single ingredient gets its share of the pesto, rather than just the pasta.

Make it Your Own: Variations and Add-Ins

Adding Grilled Chicken or Shrimp

While this salad is a fantastic vegetarian centerpiece, it's also a great base for added protein. This is especially true if you're serving it as the main course. Grilled chicken, diced or shredded, is a classic pairing. For a summer barbecue, grilled shrimp are an absolute showstopper. They add a smoky char and sweet flavor that works perfectly with the pesto. You could also add cured meats. Sliced salami or prosciutto, cut into ribbons, would add a delicious, salty kick that makes the salad even more robust.

Sneak in More Veggies

This recipe is incredibly adaptable. Think of it as a template for whatever you have in your fridge. You can easily bulk it up with more vegetables. Try adding a cup of halved cherry tomatoes for a burst of fresh juice. Roasted red peppers (from a jar, drained and chopped) add a sweet, smoky flavor. For a fresh crunch, toss in a handful of baby spinach or arugula right before serving. If you're building a full 'pasta salad bar' for your party, this pesto tortellini salad is a great start. You could also offer our [Quick Summer Mediterranean Pasta Salad](#) for guests who prefer a vinaigrette.

Transporting and Serving Your Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad

Tips for Traveling (Keep it Cold!)

Food safety is crucial for potlucks. Since this salad contains cheese and pesto, it must be kept cold. After preparing, store it in a container with a tight-fitting lid. Transport it in a cooler with ice packs. Do not let it sit at room temperature for more than two hours (or one hour if it's over 90°F). A great tip is to chill your serving bowl before you leave. When you arrive at the party, transfer the salad from its transport container to the chilled bowl. This helps it stay cool and fresh on the buffet table.

Potluck Ingredient Variations

This salad is easy to adapt for different tastes or to use up what you have. Here are some popular swaps:

Ingredient	Standard Option	Alternative Swaps
Cheese	Mozzarella Pearls	Cubed Provolone, Feta Crumbles
Tomatoes	Sun-Dried Tomatoes	Halved Cherry Tomatoes, Roasted Red Peppers
Mix-Ins	Artichoke Hearts	Kalamata Olives, Sliced Pepperoncini, Capers
Protein	(Vegetarian)	Diced Salami, Grilled Chicken, Canned Chickpeas
Pesto	Basil Pesto	Kale Pesto, Sun-Dried Tomato Pesto, Arugula Pesto

Frequently Asked Questions

How far in advance can I make this Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad?

This is a perfect make-ahead dish. You can make it up to 24 hours in advance. The flavors actually get better as they sit. If making it a day ahead, you might want to hold back about 1/4 cup of the pesto and toss it in just before serving to refresh the salad, as the pasta will absorb some of the sauce overnight.

My pasta salad seems dry after sitting. How can I fix it?

This is very common. Pasta, especially tortellini, loves to absorb sauce. To fix it, simply stir in an extra tablespoon or two of pesto. If you don't have extra pesto, a generous drizzle of high-quality extra virgin olive oil and a small squeeze of lemon juice will also work wonders to loosen it up and brighten the flavors.

What's the best way to serve this at a potluck?

Serve it cold, straight from the cooler. Bring it in its storage container, then transfer it to your serving bowl right before the meal starts. Always bring your own serving spoon. Garnish it on-site with a fresh sprinkle of parmesan and a few small basil leaves to make it look fresh and appealing.

Conclusion

This **Pesto Tortellini Pasta Salad** is more than just a recipe; it's a solution. It's the solution to "What should I bring?" It's the answer to a stress-free, make-ahead dish that everyone will genuinely enjoy. This salad is dependable, travels perfectly, and is packed with the rich, vibrant flavors of pesto, cheese, and zesty tomatoes. It's the perfect summer potluck dish that will have friends and family asking for the recipe. So, make a double batch, because this bowl will be the first one to go.