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## Spring Asparagus

By Susie Iventosch

When it comes to asparagus, I really enjoy the pencil-thin stalks that seem to shout out "spring is here at long last" as they appear in the markets. They barely need any cooking at all, and are quite delicious when still crunchy. In fact, when steaming them, I usually just bring the water to a boil and quickly turn it off, leaving the asparagus to steam off the heat because they can so easily be overcooked.

This recipe calls for little tiny bites of the raw asparagus, cut into 1/8-inch slices, and tossed into the cooked (and drained) pasta just to take the chill off, before adding the rest of the ingredients. It is such a fresh-tasting recipe with raw asparagus and basil, and yet, with the minced pistachios and fresh grated Parmesan, it is hearty enough to serve as the main course.

If you find you don't have time to shell the pistachios, try pine nuts, or walnuts. Or better yet, go pick up a bag of already shelled pistachios at Trader Joe's! Pesto is super-easy to make, and is so good when made fresh to go along with this dish. Enjoy!

### Piccolini Penne Pasta with Pistachio Pesto and Spring Asparagus

#### Ingredients

- 1 pound piccolini penne pasta
- 1 bunch fresh basil leaves, stems removed
- 1/2 cup shelled pistachios
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 4-5 ounces Parmesan cheese (split-half grated for garnish and half cut into small pieces for pesto)
- 2 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 pound skinny spring asparagus, thinly sliced

#### Directions

Place shelled pistachios in a food processor and process until finely chopped. Add garlic, basil and the Parmesan cut into small pieces and process again. Finally, add olive oil and pulse just until integrated. Set aside.

Cut asparagus into very thin (1/8-inch) slices. Set aside.

Cook pasta to al dente in large pot. Strain out water and return pasta to warm cooking pot. Add sliced asparagus and stir well. Cover for just about two minutes, to slightly warm asparagus. Then mix in all but 1/4 cup of the pesto

Piccolini Penne with Pistachio Pesto and Spring Asparagus. Photo Susie Iventosch

and serve at once. Pass extra Parmesan at the table. Serve with toasted French bread, topped with extra pesto and tomato slices.

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[back](#)

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