

A Tale of Two Sauces

I am a huge sauce fan, much to my husband's indifference. Like many passionate cooks, I believe sauce elevates an everyday, simple meal to special status. When perfect seasonal produce is plentiful, I am drawn to create simple meals of grilled veggies, changing things up with a variety of sauces. I don't mind eating zucchini or eggplant several times a week if I can create my own version every time.

So when my dear friend and Ariege Gemmo Mom came for lunch, the menu was simple: tossed salad with a citrus vinaigrette, grilled eggplant and zucchini, and steamed new potatoes.

The stars of the show, however, were my chard pesto and romesco sauce. While pesto has its origins in Genoa, Italy, romesco comes from a city called Tarragona in Catalonia, the northeastern-most region of Spain, only a few hours from Foix. Here how's you can repeat my vegan versions of those sauces at home. You will discover they complement pasta, polenta, rice and a wide variety of veggies.

Lauren's Romesco Sauce (Vegan)

Roast at 400 degrees:

- 8 Roma or 4 large heirloom tomatoes, sliced in half, seeded, roasted until they begin to fall apart
- 2 large sweet/mild red peppers, cut in half and roasted until the skin is charred

Allow tomatoes and peppers to cool and remove skin.

In a heavy skillet on medium heat, roast these items individually:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup blanched almonds (the skins are fine but will add more texture), remove when lightly toasted

- 1 slice stale gluten-free bread, whole grain if possible, broken into pieces, remove when lightly toasted

Add to the bowl of the food processor:

- Roasted and skinned tomatoes and peppers
- Peeled and diced small shallot or smashed garlic clove (according to taste)
- Almonds
- Bread
- 1 tablespoon wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- A dash of cayenne pepper or 1 tablespoon harissa sauce (optional)
- Salt to taste

Lauren's Chard Pesto (Vegan)

- 1 cup of ground nuts (consider pumpkin seeds and almonds)
- 4 large chard leaves, stem and chiffonade
- 2 handfuls of basil leaves
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup full-bodied olive oil (the better the oil, the better the pesto)
- A splash or two of ume vinegar or 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast (these add a cheesy flavor and can be omitted)
- Juice of one medium lemon or lime
- Salt to taste

I prefer to grind the nuts first, setting them aside in a mixing bowl, then blend the greens, basil and olive oil. This produces a more textured pesto. But please feel free to add all the ingredients to your food processor and process to your desired consistency. Salt to taste. This can be served immediately but is best if the flavors are given an hour or

more to meld.

Pesto stores well for a few days, but it will thicken, so you may want to thin a bit with more oil or citrus juice.