

# Extension

## Seasonal Eating Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

### Rewards from the Fair August 2012

We had a really good county fair this year. Overall the entries for the creative arts, food preservation, foods and agriculture were up by about 100 entries. We had more garden produce than I was expecting since it had been so dry prior to the fair. Fred and Joan Pimental grow beautiful, big red tomatoes and this year they placed 2nd and 3rd. The tomatoes were still in great shape on pick up day so Fred gave me the tomatoes to take home. When I cut them open, they were as beautiful on the inside as the out, red all the way through, juicy and full of that ripe summer tomato flavor. So what should I do with these – they were delicious just sliced with a little salt and pepper and I chopped one up and added it to macaroni, but these were worthy of so much more!



Fresh basil is the perfect accompaniment to tomatoes with its heady aroma of lemon, anise and cloves – I love the smell of fresh basil. My herb garden had some lovely basil just waiting to be used so my thoughts went to pesto over alternating slices of tomato and fresh mozzarella for a refreshing salad.

Pesto is a traditional Italian sauce of garlic, pine nuts, fresh basil, olive oil and parmesan cheese blended together in a food processor. Add some salt and pepper and you have a beautiful and flavorful topping for pasta, a spread for a sandwich or a filling spiraled in bread dough and baked. Today, however, I used my pesto as a dressing for the salad.

Another key component to this salad was mini-cROUTONS that I made. Homemade croutons are so easy and so much better than the hard boxed versions. Cut a couple of slices of crusty bread into cubes, I made mine miniature for this salad (about 3/8”). Melt a little butter and add an equal amount of olive oil and toss the cubes. Sprinkle with salt, pepper and a little garlic powder and spread in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees until golden on the outside, stirring a couple of times. I did mine in the toaster oven so the whole oven didn't have to heat up.

Now you're ready to assemble. The final key to this salad is seasoning each layer. Tomatoes take a lot of seasoning with salt and pepper. The fresh mozzarella is a creamy, white, semi-soft cheese, usually in a ball, with a very neutral flavor that also takes seasoning. It is different than the semi-dried version we use on pizza. So as you alternate slices of tomato and cheese, flavor them with a little sprinkle of salt and pepper. Run a line of the pesto down the center and top with your croutons and chopped kalamata olives for an extra little punch on top. You can serve this as a light summer lunch with a slice of crusty bread or make a smaller version for an appetizer plate with grilled chicken or a steak for the main entrée. Nothing says summer more than a fresh, ripe tomato so dig in and enjoy them while they last!

The Bedford County Farmers' Market is open Thursdays at 3:00 p.m. at the Celebration Pavilion. For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website (<https://utextension.tennessee.edu/bedford>). The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstration on Warm Season Veggies will be held on Wednesday, August 15 at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call the Office at 684-5971 to sign up and bring \$5.00 to cover the samples.

#### Tomato Salad with Pesto Dressing

- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 7 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 4 slices crusty Italian bread, cut into 3/8" cubes
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Garlic powder
- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- 1 1/2 tablespoons pine nuts
- 1 1/2 cups fresh basil leaves
- 1/4 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese
- 2 large ripe tomatoes, cut into 1/4" slices
- 2 balls fresh mozzarella cheese, cut into 1/4" slices
- 1/4 cup chopped kalamata olives

To make croutons, combine melted butter and 1 tablespoon of olive oil and toss with bread cubes. Place on a baking sheet in a single layer. Sprinkle with salt, pepper and garlic powder. Bake at 350 degrees until golden, stirring a couple of times, about 10 minutes or so. Allow to cool while making the pesto. In the bowl of a small food processor or blender, process garlic and pine nuts until finely ground. Add basil leaves and process until chopped but still in pieces. With machine running, add remaining 6 tablespoons olive oil in a stream and process until basil is finely chopped. Stir in parmesan cheese and add salt and pepper to taste. Set aside. On serving plates, alternate tomato and cheese slices down middle of plates, overlapping each layer and sprinkling each layer with a little salt and pepper. Pour a line of pesto down the center and sprinkle with olives and croutons. Serve immediately.