

GENOVESE MUSSELS WITH PESTO AND OLIVES *COZZE ALLA GENOVESE*

Mussels with pesto – it's not a combination that you see every day, but in Genoa it's really popular. To be honest, I wasn't sure about the idea before I tried it, but I soon changed my mind. The aromatic flavour of the basil and the saltiness of the mussels work really well together, the pine nuts add texture, and the Leccino olives add a subtle piquancy – simply *fantastico*! Make sure you buy the best-quality olives and pesto, as they're vital for the success of this dish. Serve with warm crusty bread.

1 Scrub the mussels under cold running water. Rinse away the grit and remove barnacles with a small, sharp knife. Remove the 'beards' by pulling the dark, stringy piece away from the mussels. Discard any open mussels or mussels with broken shells. Set aside.

2 Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the garlic and olives and as soon as the garlic starts to sizzle, add the mussels. Cook for about 2 minutes, stirring continuously. Increase the heat to high, add the wine and simmer for about 3 minutes, stirring occasionally.

3 Cover the saucepan and cook for a further 3 minutes or until the mussels start to open, shaking the pan occasionally.

4 Add the tomatoes, basil and pesto and season with salt and pepper. Stir to combine and cook for about 5 minutes, uncovered, stirring occasionally.

5 Discard any mussels that have not opened. Ladle into warm bowls and serve immediately.

Serves 4

1.2kg live mussels
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
4 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
100g pitted black olives (preferably Leccino or Kalamata), drained
150ml dry white wine
20 fresh red cherry tomatoes, halved
10 large fresh basil leaves
3 tablespoons good-quality, shop-bought basil pesto
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

