The fragrances of summer are fading fast, but not sweet basil. This tender herb thrives, replenishing its leaves and offering its bouquet, right up until fall’s first frost. There are over 40 varieties of basil, with twelve or so cultivated for culinary use. Sweet basil, also known as *Ocimum basilicum*, is the most common. *Ocimum* comes from the Greek verb meaning, “to be fragrant.” The herb’s broad green leaves are just that, bringing a wonderfully spicy flavor and a hint of mint and clove to the palate. Cinnamon, lemon and anise varieties add the distinctive flavors implied by their names.

Basil is best known as the main ingredient in pesto, a name derived from the Italian word meaning to pound or bruise. Originally, pesto was made by placing basil leaves in a mortar along with garlic, salt and pine nuts, then grinding the ingredients with a pestle to form a paste. Any kind of dry sharp cheese was then pounded in and whisked with olive oil.

Today, given the ease of making pesto with a food processor, we might rename the concoction, “presto!” The process now requires placing lots of washed and dried basil leaves, garlic cloves, toasted pine nuts and salt in the bowl of your food processor and pulsing it a few times. Then, with the machine running, slowly pour in the olive oil. Finally, stir in some grated parmesan cheese.

The best way to preserve your seasonal abundance of basil is to stick a few jars of pesto in the freezer. Once the jars are filled, a little more olive oil drizzled on top seals the deal, keeping the exposed pesto from turning brown. Add a tight-fitting lid and sit the jars upright in the freezer. About mid-winter, you will be delighted to find this tasty treat tucked away, quick to thaw and toss with pasta or vegetables or dollop on bread or fish. With pesto, anything goes.

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**Caprese Salad**

*Recipe developed by Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski and featured in Residential Dining Services. Serves 4*

- 2 Roma Tomatoes
- 1/2 Pint Grape Tomatoes
- 4 T. Fresh Basil, *chiffonade cut*
- 3 T. Basil Olive Oil (see recipe below)
- 1 t. Balsamic Vinegar
- 8 oz. Buffalo Mozzarella
- Sea Salt and freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

Put tomatoes, basil leaves, basil oil, balsamic vinegar, salt and pepper in a bowl. With your hand, gently mix everything together and squeeze the tomatoes a bit to release some of their juices. Add mozzarella and gently toss to blend everything together. Finish with a drizzle of balsamic vinegar as desired. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

**Basil Oil**

- 1 1/2 c. lightly packed fresh basil leaves
- 1 c. extra virgin olive oil

Rinse and drain basil leaves. Pat leaves dry with a towel. In a blender or food processor, combine basil leaves and olive oil. Pulse 6 to 8 times until leaves are finely chopped (do not purée).

Pour mixture into a 1- to 1 1/2-quart pan over medium heat. Stir occasionally until oil bubbles around pan sides and reaches 165° on a thermometer, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove from heat and let stand until cool, about 1 hour.

Line a fine wire strainer with two layers of cheesecloth and set over a small bowl. Pour oil mixture into strainer. After oil passes through, gently press basil to release remaining oil. Discard basil. Serve oil or store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 months. The olive oil may solidify slightly when chilled, but it will quickly liquefy when it comes back to room temperature.

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Caprese Salad will be served at Case, Brody Square, Riverwalk Market at Owen, The Gallery, Shaw and Holmes Halls on Thursday, September 23 for lunch. Visit [www.eatatstate.com](http://www.eatatstate.com) for dining hall hours and menus.