

*The recipes below are an excerpt from Tenderheart, A Cookbook About Vegetables and Unbreakable Family Bonds by Hetty Lui McKinnon, published by © Knopf Cooks 2023 and © Plum Books 2022.*

## **Fennel and Gnocchi Salad with Fennel Frond Pesto**

Here is a lovely double fennel salad, a wonderful way to show how we can create an entire meal around one vegetable: crunchy shaved raw fennel is slathered in fennel frond pesto and tossed with crispy morsels of pan-fried gnocchi. This salad shows how anise flavors can be layered without overthrowing the other ingredients or dominating the overall dish. This is an adaptable recipe, too—add some roasted broccoli or cauliflower, incorporate a leafy green, such as baby spinach or watercress, or substitute a filled pasta like tortellini or ravioli for the gnocchi. You could also use a short pasta shape in place of the gnocchi. You can use either vacuum-sealed or frozen gnocchi—if using frozen, don't thaw it first! I like to use baby fennel in this salad because they are sweeter and more tender, but regular fennel works just fine.

SERVES 4

extra-virgin olive oil  
1 pound 10 ounces (750 g) gnocchi  
sea salt and black pepper  
2 baby fennel bulbs (about 13 oz/375 g) or 1 regular fennel bulb (about 12 oz/350 g), finely sliced  
3/4–1 cup Fennel Frond Pesto (recipe below)  
handful of grated parmesan,  
pecorino or cheddar

**For gluten-free** • use gluten-free gnocchi

**Veganize** • use vegan cheese

**Substitute** • gnocchi: boiled or roasted potatoes • parmesan, pecorino or cheddar: nutritional yeast

Place a large skillet over medium-high heat. When hot, drizzle in 2–3 tablespoons of olive oil, add the gnocchi and season with a pinch of sea salt. Pan-fry for 3–4 minutes, tossing the gnocchi often, until golden on both sides.

Transfer the gnocchi to a large serving plate, add the fennel and fennel frond pesto and toss until well coated. Serve with a handful of grated cheese on top.

## **Fennel Frond Pesto**

Billowing, feathery fennel fronds can be transformed into a delicious pesto, with a mellow anise flavor that does not overpower. The first time I tried fennel frond pesto was during quarantine, when fresh vegetables became a precious commodity and using the whole vegetable was a necessity. During the first lockdown of 2020, my friend Lisa Marie Corso sent me her recipe for fennel frond pesto, and it was incredibly eye-opening—a vibrantly green, grassy sauce that didn't taste distinctly of fennel, much smoother than other “vegetable top” pesto mixes. I've been experimenting with different versions of fennel frond pesto ever since, sometimes with other herbs or leaves added, often without cheese, or with different nuts and seeds.

This is my favorite recipe, incorporating toasted pumpkin seeds, which add a mild nuttiness and gentle sweetness. Serve with pasta, roasted vegetables, on grain bowls or as a salad dressing.

**MAKES 1 1/2 CUPS**

about 2 1/2 cups (150 g) fennel fronds

4 garlic cloves, roughly chopped

1/2 cup toasted pumpkin seeds

sea salt

1 cup (240 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

1 3/4 ounces (50 g) hard cheese, such as cheddar, parmesan or pecorino, finely grated

### **Gluten-free**

**Veganize** • replace the hard cheese with 2–3 tablespoons of nutritional yeast or 1–2 tablespoons of miso

**Substitute** • pumpkin seeds: walnuts, pine nuts, sunflower seeds

Place the fennel fronds, garlic and pumpkin seeds in a blender and pulse a few times to chop everything up. Add about 1 teaspoon of sea salt, along with the olive oil, and blitz until you have a coarse paste.

Transfer to a bowl and stir in the cheese. Taste and add more sea salt, if needed.

**Storage:** This pesto will keep in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks, or freeze in a container or resealable bag for up to 3 months.