

Miso Peanut Pasta Salad

By mrslarkin

Food52 Editors' Comments: WHO: Mrslarkin is a pastry chef from Pound Ridge, NY, where she sells her baked goods at regional farmers markets. WHAT: A picnic-worthy pasta salad that subs mayonnaise for peanut sauce. HOW: Combine peanut butter with miso until creamy, then add some spice with vinegar and chili garlic sauce, and finish with honey and sesame oil to take the edge off the sauce. Toss with elbow pasta, scallions, watermelon radish, carrots, broccoli florets, and chopped cilantro. Serve with chopped peanuts. WHY WE LOVE IT: The combination of peanut butter, miso, and vinegar results in a creamy sauce that will have you licking your bowl. And while many Asian-inspired peanut butter dishes are heavy, this one is light enough to serve as a side or pack for a barbecue. Bonus points: This pasta salad won't spoil before the party's over.

This is not your average macaroni salad.

Serves 6, or more

- 1 pound whole wheat elbow pasta, or your favorite shape
 - 1/2 cup creamy peanut butter (I used natural unsweetened, which is more gritty, but use what you like)
 - 1 heaping tablespoon white miso
 - 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar, or rice wine vinegar
 - 1 to 2 teaspoon chili garlic sauce, to taste (get a jar of the Huy Fong and stash it in the fridge -- it's ridiculously good)
 - 2 teaspoons chopped ginger
 - 1 garlic clove, minced
 - 2 tablespoons honey (or less, if using sweetened peanut butter)
 - 3 to 5 dashes sesame oil, to taste
 - 1 bunch scallions, trimmed and sliced
 - 1/2 large watermelon radish, cut into 2-inch sticks
 - 1 medium carrot, peeled and cut into 2-inch sticks
 - 1 cup broccoli florets, blanched or lightly steamed, chopped
 - 8 sprigs fresh cilantro, chopped, legs and all, plus extra for garnish
 - Roasted peanuts, for garnish
1. Cook pasta to al dente. Reserve about a cup of the pasta water for the sauce and set aside. Drain pasta. Set aside in a large mixing bowl.
 2. In a medium mixing bowl, place peanut butter, miso, vinegar, chili garlic sauce, ginger, garlic, honey, and sesame oil. Add pasta water in 1/8-cup increments and stir until you reach a smooth, sauce-like consistency. It should be loose, but not watery, so add the water slowly. Taste for seasoning.
 3. Pour half of the sauce over the pasta and mix well. Reserving a bit of each vegetable and herb for garnishing, toss the remaining vegetables, cilantro, and sauce into the pasta, and mix well. Taste for seasoning.
 4. Garnish with reserved vegetables, cilantro, and peanuts. Serve at room temperature.