Spaghetti with basil pesto, cherry tomatoes, and ricotta
Serves 4

PESTO
3 tablespoons pine nuts
2 packed cups basil leaves
1 clove garlic, finely chopped or passed through a garlic press
1/3 cup olive oil
1/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan
Salt, to taste

1. Set the oven at 350 degrees. Have a large pasta serving bowl on hand.
2. On a pie pan, spread the pine nuts. Toast for 7 to 8 minutes, or until pale golden.
3. Bring a large pot of water to a boil (you will also cook the pasta in it.) Set a bowl of ice water next to it. Have a slotted spoon on hand.
4. In the boiling water, dunk the basil leaves, pushing them down to submerge them. After 3 seconds, with a slotted spoon transfer them to the ice water. Drain and squeeze out excess water with your hands. Leave the pot on low heat for cooking the pasta.
5. In a blender, finely grind the nuts in short bursts. Add the basil, garlic, oil, and Parmesan. Blend until the mixture is coarsely pureed, stopping the motor often to push the mixture down around the blade. Taste and add salt to taste. Scrape the pesto into a serving bowl.

PASTA
1 pound spaghetti
1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved and sprinkled with salt and pepper
1 cup whole-milk ricotta

1. Return the pot of water to a rolling boil. Add a generous amount of salt. Add the spaghetti and stir to separate the strands. Cook at a boil for 8 minutes, or until al dente. The pasta will continue to cook a little after it is drained. Scoop out and set aside 1/2 cup pasta water.
2. In a colander, drain the spaghetti.
3. Stir a small amount of the hot pasta water into the pesto to loosen it to a slurry consistency. Add the pasta and toss to coat it. Add half the tomatoes and toss with the pasta. Taste and add more salt, if you like. Distribute the remaining tomatoes and spoonfuls of ricotta on top.

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