

When the rice is tender to the bite but slightly firm in the center and looks creamy, after about 20 minutes, stir in the chicken. Cook to heat through, about 1 minute. Remove from the heat and stir in the butter, caramelized onion mixture and reserved ¼ cup stock. Season with salt and pepper and serve immediately. Serves 6.

Note: Use leftover roasted chicken or poached chicken breasts. To poach chicken breasts, put 2 to 3 bone-in breast halves in a large saucepan and add lightly salted water to cover. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 30 minutes.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, *Risotto*, by Pamela Sheldon Johns (Simon & Schuster, 2002).

Leek and Pancetta Risotto with Fines Herbes

Put the parsley, chervil, tarragon, 4 Tbs. of the olive oil, salt and pepper in a bowl. Using an immersion blender, blend until a smooth paste forms. Set the fines herbes puree aside.

In a sauté pan or a risotto pan over medium heat, sauté the pancetta until crisp, about 8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the pancetta to a small bowl. Pour off all but 1 Tbs. of the fat from the pan and add the remaining 2 Tbs. oil. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 7 minutes. Add the leeks and cook, stirring occasionally, 15 to 17 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds.

Add the rice and pancetta and stir well. Cook, stirring, until the rice is translucent, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the wine and stir until it is absorbed, about 1 minute. Add the broth ½ cup at a time, stirring constantly until it is almost completely absorbed before adding more.

When the rice is tender but firm to the bite, after 20 to 25 minutes, remove the pan from the heat. Stir in the butter, cheese and fines herbes puree, and season with salt and pepper. Serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

Williams-Sonoma Kitchen

Ingredients for Leek and Pancetta Risotto with Fines Herbes

1 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

¼ cup chopped fresh chervil

1 to 2 Tbs. chopped fresh tarragon

6 Tbs. olive oil

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

3 oz. pancetta, diced

½ yellow onion, chopped

4 leeks, white and light green portions, rinsed well and thinly sliced

3 garlic cloves, minced

1½ cups Arborio or Carnaroli rice

½ cup dry white wine

6 cups chicken broth, warmed

2 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into 2 pieces

½ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

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Tips for Making Perfect Risotto

Have all the ingredients at room temperature or warmed before you start cooking. If the ingredients are cold, it shocks the rice and causes it to stay hard at the core. It also slows down the cooking process and inhibits the release of the essential starch.

- **Sauté the onion:** In a wide, heavy saucepan over medium heat, heat the oil and/or butter. Add the onion and sauté until softened. (Sometimes green onions or leeks are used in place of the onion.) Be sure the onion does not overbrown; just cook it enough to soften and introduce its flavor subtly to the dish.

- **Coat the rice:** Add the rice to the pan with the onion. Stir until the grains are well coated with oil and/or butter and are translucent with a white dot in the center, about 3 minutes. Lightly toasting the rice in fat tempers the protein coating and coats the grains with the fat, a liquid-resistant substance that will inhibit overly rapid absorption of the cooking liquid. This allows even release of the starch for a more consistent creaminess in the risotto. Never allow the rice to brown. A splash of wine is often added at this point to deglaze the pan, loosening any cooked bits stuck to the bottom. Stir until the wine is completely absorbed.

- **Add the stock:** Add gently simmering stock to the rice, a ladleful at a time, stirring frequently after each addition. Adjust the heat so the rice cooks briskly but not so quickly that the grains start to fall apart. Keep the grains *bagnato*, bathed in broth, so they don't dry out, but wait until the stock is nearly fully absorbed (but the rice is never dry on top) before adding the next ladleful. The slow addition of the liquid controls the release of starch;

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Technique Class: All About Risotto

A specialty of northern Italy, risotto has earned a place as a legendary Italian dish. Rich, creamy and irresistible, it has become a favorite outside its homeland as well. Because risotto can be embellished with any number of savory ingredients, including cheeses, vegetables, meats and seafood as well as sweet additions, such as dried fruit and chocolate, it will quickly become one of the most versatile and well-loved dishes in your cooking repertoire.

Much of the Italian rice harvest is used for making risotto. Italians have traditionally served it as *primo*, the first course, after the antipasto and before the *secondo*, the meat or fish course. Today, risotto has assumed additional roles in the meal, appearing as a main course or a complementary side dish as well as a first course. Indeed, a bowl of steaming risotto, a crisp green salad, some country bread and a good bottle of wine will delight even the most discriminating diner.

Ingredients and Equipment for Making Risotto

The key to a successful risotto lies in the ingredients. The requirements are simple: high-quality rice, sweet butter, fresh seasonal vegetables, good wine and flavorful stock.

The Rice

Good risotto requires a starchy rice. Some varieties have more starch than others do, and the Italian rices traditionally used for risotto hold their shape during cooking and remain al dente (tender yet firm to the bite) when ready.

The method of cooking risotto—adding hot liquid a little at a time as the rice slowly simmers—was developed because an outer layer of protein surrounds the starch. As the stock filters through tiny holes in this layer and cooks the rice, the starch is slowly released, thickening the cooking liquid and giving the dish its characteristic creaminess. Do not rinse the rice before cooking as it causes the starch to begin releasing too soon.

Among the numerous varieties of rice for risotto, the four most readily available ones outside Italy are Arborio, Carnaroli, Vialone Nano and Baldo.

Other Basic Ingredients

Unsalted butter is typically used for cooking risotto in northern Italy, as it is the traditional cooking fat of the region. Extra-virgin olive oil is good because it doesn't burn as quickly as butter, and the flavor is also delicious. A combination of butter and extra-virgin oil works well, too. Be sure to use a high-quality oil—the rice absorbs every flavor with which it comes into contact.

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Tips for Making Perfect Risotto (cont.)

what isn't absorbed evaporates. Keep stirring frequently, which helps the fat and starch join and keeps the rice from scorching. Reserve about ¼ cup stock to add at the end.

- **Stir in the final ingredients:** The rice is done when it is tender to the bite but slightly firm in the center and looks creamy; this takes about 20 minutes. At this point, add any reserved vegetables or other ingredients called for. Cook to heat through, remove from the heat and add a tablespoon of butter, freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (if using) and the reserved ¼ cup stock. Season with salt and pepper and serve immediately.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, *Risotto*, by Pamela Sheldon Johns (Simon & Schuster, 2002).

Ingredients for Risotto with Mushrooms

6 cups low-sodium chicken stock, plus more as needed

3 Tbs. unsalted butter

1 Tbs. olive oil

1 yellow onion, finely chopped

½ lb. white button mushrooms, brushed clean and sliced

2 cups Arborio or Carnaroli rice

½ cup dry white wine

3 Tbs. beef demi-glace

⅓ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Onion is used in nearly every risotto, but green onions and leeks are good stand-ins. Other vegetables may be added along with the onion, and the size you cut them will vary depending on the cooking time of each vegetable.

Any wine that you would drink with pleasure can be used in risotto. Its bouquet must be respectable, for its flavor is readily absorbed into the rice. Never use chilled wine; the temporary chill disturbs the steady cooking of the rice, which can result in grains with hard centers.

Since risotto absorbs so much liquid while it cooks, the choice of the cooking liquid is critical. If you are making a risotto that contains meat, use beef or veal stock. A risotto with poultry added is best made with chicken stock, while a seafood risotto begs for fish or shellfish stock. In Italy, whole milk is used to cook the rice for sweet dishes, but fruit juice also works well.

Most risotto recipes call for stirring in butter at the end of the cooking because it gives the risotto a silky-smooth finish. This is optional. When using a top-quality rice with plenty of starch, there is enough creaminess to forgo the butter. Seasoning with salt and pepper should also be done just before serving. Sea salt and freshly ground pepper deliver the most flavor. Cheese is generally stirred in at the last moment. In Italy, cheese is never used in a dish with fish or shellfish, for fear that its strong flavor will overpower these more delicate ones.

The Right Pan

The equipment needed for making risotto is simple: a large pan for the simmering stock, a ladle, a pan for cooking the risotto and a spoon for stirring. The risotto pan should be wide and heavy bottomed. A broad surface will disperse the heat more evenly to allow uniform reduction of the liquid. A heavy bottom will help prevent scorching.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, *Risotto*, by Pamela Sheldon Johns (Simon & Schuster, 2002).

Risotto with Mushrooms

In a saucepan over medium heat, bring the stock to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low and keep warm.

In a large saucepan or risotto pan over medium heat, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter with the olive oil. Add the onion and sauté until tender and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring, until just wilted, about 2 minutes. Stir in the rice and cook, stirring, until the grains are hot and coated with oil, about 2 minutes. Add the wine and continue to cook, stirring often, until the liquid is absorbed.

Add the stock ½ cup at a time, stirring constantly until it is almost completely absorbed before adding more. The risotto is done when the rice grains are creamy on the outside and firm yet tender to the bite, 20 to 25 minutes total.

Remove the risotto from the heat. Stir in the remaining 1 Tbs. butter, the demi-glace and cheese. Season with salt and pepper. Spoon the risotto into warmed soup bowls and serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Savoring Series, *Savoring Italy*, by Michele Scicolone (Time-Life Books, 1999).

Risotto with Figs and Almonds

Vin Santo is a sweet, amber dessert wine that has a slightly caramel flavor laced with hints of almond and fig. Other wines that would work well in this dessert risotto are sweet Marsala, Malvasia or other late-harvest wines. For a delicious variation, prepare this dessert risotto with different types of nuts and dried fruit.

In a saucepan over medium-low heat, combine the apple juice and sugar. Bring to a simmer, stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Maintain at a gentle simmer.

In a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat, melt 3 Tbs. of the butter. Add the apple and sauté until softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the apple to a bowl and set aside.

Add the rice to the same pan and stir until each grain is well coated with oil and translucent with a white dot in the center, about 3 minutes. Add the wine and stir until it is completely absorbed.

Add the simmering apple juice a ladleful at a time, stirring frequently after each addition. Wait until the juice is almost completely absorbed (but the rice is never dry on top) before adding the next ladleful. Reserve ¼ cup juice to add at the end.

When the rice is tender to the bite but slightly firm in the center, after about 20 minutes, stir in the apple. Cook to heat through, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the remaining 3 Tbs. butter and the reserved ¼ cup juice. Sprinkle with the toasted almonds, garnish with the figs and serve immediately. Serves 8.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, *Risotto*, by Pamela Sheldon Johns (Simon & Schuster, 2002).

Risotto with Chicken and Caramelized Onions

A delicious way to transform leftover roasted chicken into another main dish, risotto is hearty enough to serve on its own, accompanied by a simple salad and a glass of wine.

In a large, heavy saucepan over medium-high heat, warm ¼ cup of the olive oil. Add the onions and leek and sauté until the onions turn golden brown, about 15 minutes. Add the Madeira and deglaze the pan, stirring to scrape up the browned bits from the bottom. Cook until the liquid is reduced by half.

Meanwhile, in a saucepan over medium heat, bring the stock to a gentle simmer and maintain over low heat. Add 1 cup of the simmering stock to the onion mixture and continue to cook over medium-high heat until the liquid has reduced and the mixture is quite thick, about 15 minutes more. Set aside.

While the onions simmer, in another large, heavy saucepan over medium heat, warm the remaining ¼ cup olive oil. Add the rice and stir until each grain is well coated with oil and translucent with a white dot in the center, about 3 minutes.

Add the simmering stock a ladleful at a time, stirring frequently after each addition. Wait until the stock is almost completely absorbed (but the rice is never dry on top) before adding the next ladleful. Reserve ¼ cup stock to add at the end.

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Ingredients for Risotto with Figs and Almonds

7 to 8 cups apple juice

½ cup sugar

6 Tbs. (¾ stick) unsalted butter

1 Granny Smith or pippin apple, peeled, cored and diced

3 cups Arborio or Carnaroli rice

1 cup Vin Santo or other sweet wine, at room temperature

¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted

6 figs, quartered lengthwise

Ingredients for Risotto with Chicken and Caramelized Onions

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 sweet white onions, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 leek, white portion only, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 cup Madeira wine, at room temperature

9 to 10 cups chicken stock

3 cups Arborio or Carnaroli rice

2 cups chopped cooked chicken (see Note)

2 Tbs. unsalted butter

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste