

Basic Risotto and variations

Risotto

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| Serves | 4 people |
| Preparation Time | 8 minutes |
| Cooking Time | 20-25 minutes |

In the North of Italy, creamy risotto is served as a first course, but you can serve it as a main dish, with a salad and crusty bread.

Basic risotto

1 Small onion, peeled and very finely chopped

1 Stick celery, very finely chopped

6 Tablespoons butter

½ Glass dry white wine

1 - 1¼ liters good quality chicken stock

1½ Cup risotto rice, like arborio, (do not wash the rice!)

3 Tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1 Heat the stock in a separate pot, and keep it simmering until needed.

2 In a large heavy bottomed saucepan, melt **4 Tablespoons butter**. Stir in the finely chopped onion and celery, and cook gently over low heat until soft and slightly golden.

3 Raise the heat slightly, when the onion and celery base of the risotto, called the 'soffrito', starts to sizzle, add the rice. Turn the rice around in the 'soffrito' for a few minutes until it is well coated with butter.

4 Pour in the dry white wine and let it cook until the wine evaporates.

5 Lower the heat to medium and start adding a ladleful of the hot stock to the rice, stirring with a wooden spoon as you go. Let the liquid be absorbed before you add the next ladleful of stock.

6 Continue stirring and adding the liquid one ladleful at a time until all the stock has been absorbed. After about 20-25 minutes the rice should be cooked.

7 Take the saucepan off the heat and beat in the grated parmesan cheese. The cheese will melt and coat the rice. Finally stir in **2 Tablespoons of butter**. This is called 'mancato' and is the process that adds the final creaminess to the rice. Cover and let it settle for a few minutes before serving.

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Risotto

(continue...)

The basic risotto is very gently flavoured. Use the same technique to build in any flavour you like, but keep it simple. Add one or two extra ingredients only. Remember that ingredients that take more than 20 minutes or so to cook, need to be cooked separately. Ingredients that cook within 20 minutes can usually be added while the rice is cooking.

Spinach Risotto

Gradually stir in **200g** or so rinsed, baby spinach or chopped Swiss chard, leaves halfway through the cooking of the risotto. Add a **grating of nutmeg** at the end and a **squeeze of lemon juice** as well as the butter and grated parmesan cheese.

Asparagus Risotto

Use about **400g of asparagus** to make a fabulous risotto. Rinse the asparagus. Snap off the bottom of the stalks where they snap naturally. Cut off the top of the spears as they take less time to cook. Cook the stalks in the simmering chicken stock until just tender. Remove the stalks and cut into bite-size pieces and add them to the basic risotto halfway through cooking. Add the tips for the last 5 minutes of cooking. Lift the flavour with plenty of grated parmesan cheese and a good blob of butter.

Courgette Risotto

Sauté **3-4 grated courgettes** in a frying pan with a little olive oil and a **few slivers of garlic**. Cook them until they are just brown on the edges. Season with salt and add them to the onion and celery 'saffritto' at the beginning of cooking. Add a good **Tablespoon of finely chopped flat-leaf parsley** at the end.

GOOD AS... a first course / I Primmi or as a light main dish, served with a plain green salad and crusty bread.