

Risotto Alla Milanese

Saffron Risotto

Serves: 6

Preparation time: 30 minutes

1 to 1 1/2 quart meat or vegetable stock
1 Tablespoon butter
1 small shallot, finely minced
2 cups Arborio or Carnaroli rice
1/2 teaspoon sea salt, plus more to taste
1/2 cup white wine
1/4 teaspoon saffron threads
1 Tablespoon butter
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

In a 2-quart saucepot, bring the stock to a simmer and keep it hot.

In a saucepan over medium-low heat, melt the butter and add the shallot. Cook until the shallot is translucent, about three minutes.

Add the rice, stir and let it toast for 1 to 2 minutes. The rice will be fragrant and hot to the touch. Add the salt and wine, stir to combine, and let it evaporate.

Add 2 cups of stock, enough to cover the rice by 1/8-inch, and stir into the rice. Bring to a simmer. Adjust the heat to maintain the simmering, cover the pot with a lid leaving it slightly open, and set a timer for 5 minutes.

Surprise! There is no need to continuously stir the rice, especially at the beginning when there is a lot of liquid in the pot. However, stand near the stove, stirring now and then, while checking that the rice does not stick to the bottom, boils too fiercely, or sits idling. Add more stock as soon as it starts drying out.

While the risotto cooks, use a mortar and pestle to grind the saffron threads. Transfer the saffron powder to a heat-proof container, add 1 ladleful of hot stock, and stir to combine.

After the first 5 minutes, or as soon as the broth dries out, add the saffron stock. Stir and keep it at a simmer. From now on, start adding the broth by the ladleful every time the rice dries out.

Test the rice for doneness after about 14 minutes. The risotto should be ready in 20 minutes, but some rice cooks faster. You want the rice to be soft to the bite but still have a firm texture without being floury. This is also a good time to adjust salt.

You are aiming for a consistency called “all’onda” (wavy); when you tilt the pot or the plate, the risotto should move like a hot lava wave. If necessary, add a bit of stock to loosen the risotto. Start the “Mantecatura” - the final step of risotto making.

Remove the pot from the heat, add 2 tablespoons of butter and 2 tablespoons of Parmigiano cheese. Cover the risotto with a lid and let it rest for 1 minute.

Energetically stir the risotto for a few seconds, emulsifying the butter with the remaining liquid in the risotto, thus making it creamy.

Serve risotto immediately, sprinkled with Parmigiano cheese.

Recipe by Paola Albanesi

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Shiveed Baghaleh Polow ba Mahi

Fresh fava beans and dill rice pilaf with crispy saffron Tahdig and fish

Serves: 4-6

Preparation time: 60 minutes

2 cups white basmati rice, soaked for 1 hour and rinsed

8 1/4 cups water, divided

2 tablespoons salt, for parboiling the rice and will be rinsed out.

1/2 cup dill weed, dry

2 cups fava beans, fresh or frozen

4 tablespoons oil, divided

1/4 teaspoon ground saffron, dissolved in 2 tablespoons hot water

Fish

1 white-fleshed fish, sea bass, trout, sea bream, branzino

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon pepper, ground

1/4 teaspoon turmeric, ground

3 tablespoons oil

Rice

Bring 8 cups of water and salt to a boil in a large covered pot.

Add the rinsed rice and boil on high heat uncovered for about 5-7 minutes, or until the rice has slightly softened.

Turn the heat off, remove and strain about one cup of the boiled rice and place in a small bowl. Combine with 1 tablespoon of the saffron-water mixture and gently mix. Set aside.

Add the dill and fresh fava bean to the big pot with the remainder of the rice and gently stir.

Drain the rice mixture in a colander and set aside while you prepare the pan.

Add 2 tablespoons of oil to a non-stick pot.

Spread the saffron rice evenly in the bottom of the pot. This will be the crispy rice referred to as the Tahdig.

Pour the remainder of the rinsed rice, fava bean, and dill mixture to the pot and lightly fluff with a fork.

Evenly drizzle the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil over the top of the rice.

Pour 1/4 cup of water evenly over the top of the rice. Wrap the lid with a clean towel and place on top of the pot. This will allow the rice to steam.

Steam the rice over medium-low heat for about 45 minutes.

Pour the remaining 1 tablespoon of saffron water over the top of the rice. Turn off the heat and allow to sit for 5 minutes before serving.

Fish

About 15 minutes before the rice is ready, begin preparing the fish.

Rinse the fish under cool water and pat dry with paper towels. Season the fish with salt, pepper, and turmeric all over, including the inside cavity of the fish.

Heat the oil in a large enough frying pan to fit the size of your fish and fry on medium-high heat for about 3-5 minutes on each side. The times will vary based on the size of the fish.

The fish will become crispy and golden on the outside and remain flaky and tender on the inside.

Assembly

Select a large tray or platter to place upside down on top of the pan and carefully and swiftly invert the rice onto the platter.

There are many ways to serve this rice. You can keep the rice and Tahdig as is and place the fried fish on top. Or you can remove the Tahdig and place it on a separate plate while decoratively arranging the fish on top of the rice.

Serve with Persian pickled garlic and wedges of bitter oranges. Otherwise, a squeeze of lemon would also do the job!