

Risotto, a Painter's Palette
Tuscan Table Wine and Cooking School
By Lou Bruno

Risotto represents a world staple in its most glorious form. Rice can basically be divided into two categories, although there are tens of thousands of different varieties. The two classes would be long grain, which is less starchy and usually cooks up to a dry, fluffy grain. Medium or short grain is the other type of rice, it has extra surface starch that yields the sticky rice of some Asian cuisine and the sought after creamy sauce of risotto.



Italian recipes are based on the medium/short grain of rice. The most common of course is *Arborio*; my personal favorite is *Carnaroli*. I enjoy its firm texture and creamier outcome. The third grain for risotto called *Vialone Nano* is the most costly, and takes less time to cook, but yields a less creamy sauce.

In cooking Risotto, a large enough and wide enough pot or saucepan is needed for ease in stirring and to allow adequate evaporation of the cooking liquid. Although chicken stock is the traditional, you can use beef, vegetable or fish stock, depending on what subject matter you want to “paint” with your risotto. Homemade stock is desirable, but not often practical, so I suggest store bought stock with low amounts of sodium, and save the salt addition as the very last ingredient. Remember the salt element

intensifies with cooking and cheese and salted butter will also contribute to the sodium level.

I cook risotto in Extra Virgin olive oil, some use butter. In either case, when you sauté the onions it will serve you best to caramelize or cook the onions for a longer period of time since this will create a sweeter and richer taste to your risotto. It is generally my choice to use wine in most of my recipes, but if you choose to do so, remember, you cook with what you would drink. Bad wine makes bad food. Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano is definitely a difference. Do not use pre-grated cheese unless absolutely necessary.

As mentioned in my recipes to follow, perfectly made risotto should be “custardy”. If it has to sit for a while before service, have additional warm stock to mix with it to reconstitute it to its pleasurable state of creamy and ‘custardy” – it should never clump, it should be like thin pudding.

The *Risotto de Venezia* is a classic Northern Italian dish whose origin is in the lovely and romantic region of Venice. It was the “signature starch” of my restaurants, sought by many as a pleasant main dish with a simple Arugula Salad dressed in lemon oil and fresh lemon juice.



The *Risotto Luigi d'Toscana* is my *painting* using a media of Carnaroli Risotto and a background of tenderloin with heavy accents of Portobello's, hints of garlic, undertones of the finest cheese of Emilia - Romagna and a mad splash of red wine.

Risotto is a *Painter's Palette*. The basic ingredients and preparations of this humble rice grain can make glorious comfort meals of fish, vegetables or meat a noble feast

Recipes

Risotto de Venezia

Ingredients:

- 1 pound Canarolli Rice
- 1 pound sliced bacon strips cut into one inch pieces
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, fine diced
- 6 cups (48 oz) chicken stock
- 2 ½ cups shelled peas (room temperature)
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
- ¼ pound unsalted butter, cut into small squares
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Procedure:

In a small saucepan over high heat, bring the chicken stock to a simmer, reduce heat and keep the stock hot. Sauté Bacon until crisp in a large 8 to 10 quart pot or saucepan. Remove bacon and set aside. In the same pot, use bacon drippings or replace with olive oil and sauté onions until translucent (about 7 to 8 minutes). Add the rice and stir until a white spot appears in the center of the grain (about 2 minutes).

Add the hot stock about a cup at a time, stirring constantly until the stock is absorbed and the rice starts to soften. This will take about 10 minutes and you will have used about ¾ of the total stock.

Add additional stock, about a half of a cup at a time, saving one cup. Stir constantly and the rice will become nice and creamy; add the cheese and the butter, mix well. Fold in the peas and bacon. Cook for a few more minutes and blend in the remaining stock so that the risotto has a custardy consistency. It should be like a thick wave rather than thick clump of rice. Add more stock if you don't have the custard consistency.

Serve as a meal with a great white or light red from Veneto, Italy, or serve as a side dish with your favorite entrée. Serves 6.

See www.tuscantable.com for additional recipes