



RISOTTO MILANESE

alla Nonna dal 1962

SERVINGS:5

PREPPING TIME: 10 MIN COOKING TIME: 20-30 MIN

INGREDIENTS

1 large onion
5 T unsalted butter
2 cups Arborio rice
1 glass of white wine
6 cups chicken broth
a pinch of saffron
a pinch of sea salt
3.5 oz freshly grated
grana cheese such as
Parmigiano Reggiano or
Grana Padano

DIRECTIONS

Finely chop onion. Melt butter in a large heavy based saucepan and saute the onion until it is softened and has taken on a golden color. Stir rice into butter, onion mixture until **thoroughly** coated but not brown. Slightly increase the heat and add the wine (Nonna never measured anything but most recipes take this to mean about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup to 1 cup), Continue to stir the risotto as the wine is being absorbed. At this point you will begin to slowly add the simmering chicken broth, a ladleful at a time and cook the risotto over medium heat stirring constantly until it has absorbed the added broth. When the broth has been absorbed, add another ladleful and repeat the process. Continue like this until the rice can absorb no more. Add a pinch of salt if needed.

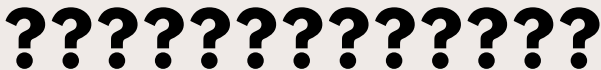
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Add the stock by ladling in one cup at a time and allowing the mixture to come to a medium bubble stirring occasionally to keep the rice from sticking as it absorbs the liquid. The portioned adding of the liquid is important to achieve that creamy, silky consistency that is a hallmark of a well-made risotto. Adding the liquid too quickly will ruin a risotto's texture.



A pinch of saffron can be infused into chicken broth that has been simmering on the stove in another pan. The saffron will give the risotto milanese its classic golden color. Some cooks add the saffron just before the end of the cooking process in order to maintain its delicate flavor.

WHEN IS THE RISOTTO DONE?



When the rice is of a creamy consistency yet the grains remain separate and *al dente* to the taste. Different types of rice vary in the way they absorb the liquid so Nonna would say "just keep stirring it until it is done"! Every risotto will be slightly different. But remember, you will be adding a handful of grated cheese and a pat of butter at the very end. The cheese will thicken up the risotto so do not allow all the moisture to be absorbed or you will have a paste.

7 POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN MAKING AN AUTHENTIC ITALIAN RISOTTO

1. the right choice of the pan
2. the right choice of the rice
3. the right choice of the fat
4. the right choice of the "toast"
5. the right choice of the wine
6. the right temperature of the liquid (stock)
7. the right spoon and amount of stirring



The Pan

Our Nonna used a heavy bottomed, straight sided skillet designed for long and even heat retention 10-12 inches in diameter. The depth and wide surface area of the pan are important so that the liquid is evaporating at about the same rate that the rice is cooking, leaving behind a concentration of starch that yields a creamier risotto. Risotto can be successfully made in any high-sided, heavy bottomed skillet that provides even heat. What about a non-stick skillet? I don't think our Nonna ever had a nonstick pan and tradition would say no because you want to cook off (evaporate) the liquid with each addition until the rice is about to stick to the bottom of your pan.

Should you cover the risotto as it cooks? Risotto cooks without a cover, so instead of steaming, it simmers until the liquid fully absorbs and the rice is *al dente*.

The Rice

A short to medium-grain rice that has a high starch content is the right rice for risotto. In the US Arborio rice is the most widely used for all risotto recipes because you can find it almost everywhere. In Italy the historic rice for making risotto is Carnaroli for its ideal consistency, creaminess and aroma. It absorbs more broth (and more flavor) while keeping its structure without falling apart which is important as risotto requires a certain amount of stirring to release the starch content. Other varieties include Vialone Nano, Baldo, Riso Roma and regional varieties. These types of rice are well-balanced and with good absorption and low loss of starch, qualities necessary to make a good risotto. Rice used to make risotto has a "pearl", *la perla*, in the center of the grain that reveals itself as the rice is "toasted" in the hot oil/butter. This opaque center stands out against the translucent grain. Our Nonna used to say that when the rice opens its eye it will soon be time to add the liquid.

The only rice to really avoid when making a risotto is long-grain rice, like basmati or jasmine, as they do not have enough starch content to achieve the standard of creaminess found in a well-made risotto. Also never rinse the rice before cooking. The rice's starch layer adds to the creaminess of the risotto so washing is not recommended.

The Fat

The right choice of fat for making a risotto is extra virgin olive oil or butter or a combination of both. Oil is needed to allow the onion to brown and rice to "toast". The toasting of the rice or "*tostatura*," is extremely important and a step you should never skip. Toasting seals the grain and creates a selective barrier that allows the grain to slowly absorb moisture without becoming soggy and also prevents it from breaking as it cooks. Toasting also reveals "the pearl" in the rice grain and is a marker that allows you to move to begin adding your liquid. Allowing the onion to brown and rice to "toast" should not take too long – not more than a minute.

The Wine

Adding wine at this stage adds another layer of flavor and balances the richness of the risotto. Do not use any wine that you would not drink. White is the wine of choice for this risotto and include a Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc or Chardonnay.

The Liquid

A good quality stock generally chicken, vegetable or seafood is slowly added into the mixture while the risotto cooks at a medium simmer, pausing until each portion of the liquid has been absorbed before adding more and continuing the process as the recipe directs. The portioned adding of the liquid is important to achieve the creamy, silky consistency that is a hallmark of a well-made risotto. Adding the liquid too quickly and over stirring will ruin a risotto's texture.

To make ladling easier have your pot of broth next to your risotto pot on the stove. Make sure your broth is hot. Adding cold broth to hot rice results in a hard, uncooked kernel in the center of the grain.

The Stir

Here is where the cook's impatience has been the undoing of many a risotto. You must add the stock by ladling in one portion at a time and allowing the mixture to come to a medium bubble stirring occasionally to keep the rice from sticking as it absorbs the liquid. Pause, then once the rice has absorbed most of the liquid, add a half-cup more of the stock and keep stirring gently, pausing between each addition as the mixture comes to a medium bubble and the stock is absorbed. Aim to have the stock mostly absorbed by this method over the course of about 15 minutes.

The key to stirring a risotto is the right amount of agitation because risotto's creaminess comes from the starch generated when the grains of rice rub against each other. Proper stirring releases the starch that creates a creamy sauce. It is not necessary to stir the risotto constantly but do not abandon it either. Over stirring will add air into the risotto, cooling it down and making it mushy and gluey. But if you don't stir enough, the rice will stick to the bottom and burn. Risotto shouldn't take more than 20-30 minutes to cook to reach that ideal al dente texture, creamy and soft, just firm enough in the center.

The Spoon

Italians prefer a wooden spoon. A wooden spoon is also a better choice than metal because it does not react with any of the ingredients. The spoon assists in the last step of risotto preparation, the *mantecatura*. In Italian mantecare means whipping to reach creamy stage resulting all'onda, the wave. When the risotto is done it is removed from the burner and butter and cheese (typically parmigiano) are whipped into the rice. The texture of a well-made risotto as you tip it from the pan is like an ocean wave as it is poured onto a heated flat plate or warm shallow bowl. Then take a moment to pause and enjoy the elegant simplicity one of Italy's most iconic dishes and the culinary and cultural heritage of our Italian Nonna.

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Honoring the legacy of our grandmother's cooking.

Dedicated to the memory of Epifania Trevisan Marasco, Marian Marasco

and Lydia Xenia Marasco Sarlo

le donne vere

