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Resplendent Risotto

THIS SPRING VEGETABLE RISOTTO IS TOPPED OFF WITH SEA SCALLOPS

LET'S MAKE AN INDULGENT, rich, and creamy risotto, a delightful way to celebrate spring! Here I'm preparing a savory risotto brimming with vibrant spring green vegetables. I'm adding delicious freshly seared sea scallops which are fancy enough to serve for a special meal and easy enough to elevate any weeknight dinner. Risotto is an adaptable dish. Serve it as a complete vegetarian meal or as a side with your favorite protein.

Contrary to popular belief, risotto is not difficult to make. With a few pro tips, you can whip up this culinary masterpiece in just 30 minutes. Timing is crucial in this recipe. Some may advise you to cook the risotto slowly for a longer duration. However, I assure you that this approach will result in a thick, starchy, and mushy texture. The goal is to achieve a rich, creamy, and slightly al dente (tender but firm) rice.

Seared Scallops

Plan for 3–4 sea scallops per person. Dry your scallops with paper towel. Place in a hot cast iron pan or heavy sauté pan that is dry. Let sear in place for 1.5-2 minutes. When browned, carefully turn over each scallop then add 1.5 Tbs. of cold butter to the pan as the other side sears for another 1.5 minutes. They cook quickly—take care not to overcook. Then, place them on a plate and pour over the remaining juices from the pan.

Risotto

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 Tbs. olive
- 1 1/2 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 3 cups, chopped leeks, white, and green parts (shallots can be substituted)
- One cup chopped fennel
- 1 1/2 cups Arborio rice
- 2/3 cup dry, white wine
- 4 cups simmering chicken stock
- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed, cut on a diagonal and blanched
- 1 1/2 cups, frozen peas, defrosted
- 1 Tbs freshly grated lemon zest
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 Tbs. freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/3 cup mascarpone cheese
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (extra for serving)
- 3 Tbs. minced fresh chives (extra for serving)

METHOD:

- Heat the olive oil and butter in sauce pan over medium heat add leaks and fennel sauté five minutes until tender. Add the rice and stir for one minute. Add the wine, let simmer over low heat, stirring until the wine has absorbed.
- Add chicken stock two ladles at a time. See Pro Tips for the technique.
- When the risotto has absorbed all the stock and rice has reached al dente, firm but tender, remove from heat. In a separate bowl, whisk the lemon juice and mascarpone cheese until combined.
- Stir the peas and asparagus into the rice. Add the lemon juice mascarpone mixture, the Parmesan cheese, and chives. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and serve hot with additional chives and shaved Parmesan cheese. Top with seared sea scallops. Enjoy!

Pro Tips:

These are my essential tips for making risotto.

Never rinse your Arborio rice before cooking it. The starch is essential in risotto, and rinsing can remove it. Use a wide, heavy-bottomed pot for even cooking.

Opt for the finest Arborio rice, preferably Italian, renowned for its high starch content. Once the fennel and leeks are softened (see recipe), add the rice and stir over medium heat for just ONE minute for toasting which enriches the flavor.

Keep the stock warm and simmering as you add it to the rice. This helps the rice absorb the liquid and release its starches. Deglaze the pan with wine, allowing it to evaporate. This adds a layer of flavor to the risotto.

The most important step is when adding the broth. Pour two ladles of broth at a time, stirring gently. The risotto should be at a medium bubble as it absorbs the liquid. Avoid constant stirring; instead, stir once every 30 seconds to prevent the rice from sticking to the bottom. As the rice absorbs the broth, add two more ladles. You should use all four cups of broth in 16 minutes.

At this point, the rice should be al dente. Remove the pot from the heat before adding any additional ingredients.

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