

A CLASSIC RISOTTO IS A RICH, CREAMY DISH WITH NEARLY A PORRIDGE-LIKE CONSISTENCY, YET EACH GRAIN OF RICE RETAINS A DISTINCT BITE. IN ITALIAN RISOTTO, THE RICE IS PARCHED AS IN THE PILAF METHOD, BUT THE LIQUID IS ADDED AND ABSORBED GRADUALLY WHILE THE GRAIN IS STIRRED ALMOST CONSTANTLY. THE STARCH SLOWLY RELEASES DURING THE COOKING PROCESS, PRODUCING A CREAMY TEXTURE.

risotto

Grated cheese is often included, and vegetables, meats, or fish may be added to create a risotto that can be served as an appetizer or main course. Although risotto's preparation is relatively lengthy and requires constant attention, there are ways to streamline the process, making it suitable for restaurant service.

Risotto is traditionally made with special Italian varieties of medium-grain round rice. The best known of these is Arborio, but other varieties include Vialone Nano and Carnaroli. Other grains, including other long-grain or brown rices, barley, wheat berries, or small pasta shapes, may also be prepared with this method, but the quality of the finished dish is not the same as a risotto made with an Italian medium-grain rice. The cooking time will be longer for brown rice and whole grains, and the amount of liquid required may be greater.

The cooking liquid most often suggested for risotto is a high-quality stock or broth. Measure the appropriate quantity of stock or broth, season it if necessary, and bring to a simmer before starting to cook. Wine may replace a portion of the stock or broth in some recipes. Simmering the stock first shortens the risotto's cooking time somewhat and provides an opportunity to add ingredients to infuse the broth with flavor and color. Opinions differ regarding whether wine should be added early in the cooking time or nearer the end. Some chefs prefer to combine the stock and wine and bring them to a simmer together, to cook away the harsh flavor of raw wine and improve the dish's taste.

Finely minced leeks, shallots, or onions are usually included in a risotto. Other aromatic vegetables, including garlic, mushrooms, fennel, carrots, or celery, may be added to some dishes. They should be finely cut or thinly sliced to release their flavors fully. Spices such as saffron and fresh herbs may also be added.

Butter contributes a sweet, rich flavor to a risotto. Other fats and oils, especially olive oil, may also be used. Cheese, usually Parmesan or Romano, should be added as close to service time as possible to assure the best flavor. Meat, seafood, fish, poultry, or vegetables may be included.

A wide, heavy-gauge saucepan or sautoir is best for making risotto. Use a spoon, preferably wooden or heat-proof silicone, for stirring, and if the risotto is to be cooled and finished later, use a sheet pan or similar wide shallow pan for rapid cooling.

» basic formula

Risotto

(10 servings)

2 cups/480 mL Arborio or other medium- to short-grain white or brown rice or

1 lb/454 g orzo or similar small pasta shapes or

1 lb/454 g fideo or similar thin noodles

1½ to 1¾ qt/1.44 to 1.68 L stock, broth, or water for white rices.

Brown rices or small pastas may require more.

(Optional: Replace up to 20% of the cooking liquid with dry white wine)

Salt and pepper

Bay leaf, thyme, or other herbs

Onions or other aromatic vegetables

Grated cheese

method
at-a-glance »

1. Heat a cooking fat.
2. Add onion and other aromatics.
3. Add the rice and cook it until it is glazed.
4. Add the simmering liquid in three parts; stir constantly as the rice absorbs the liquid.
5. Add the wine, if used, as the final addition of liquid.
6. Adjust the seasoning and serve the risotto.

expert tips «

There are three basic points at which flavoring and/or seasonings may be added to the risotto.

Before the rice is added, aromatic vegetables may be added to sweating onion to bolster the finished flavor of a risotto. Some examples are:

CARROTS / CELERY / GARLIC

Herbs and seasonings may be used by first adding them to the liquid to infuse. The choice of liquid will also do a lot to determine the flavor of the finished dish and should be selected carefully to complement all the other flavors. Some common herbs and seasoning are:

BAY LEAVES / SAFFRON / WATER FROM REHYDRATING DRIED MUSHROOMS

Near or at the end of cooking, garnish ingredients may be added. The timing for the addition of these ingredients is important and will depend on the required cooking time of the individual ingredient:

CUT OR WHOLE VEGETABLES, SUCH AS BROCCOLI, PEAS, OR ASPARAGUS / FRESH HERBS, SUCH AS BASIL, OREGANO, OR SAGE / SEAFOOD, SUCH AS SHRIMP, SCALLOPS, OR SQUID

For a healthier option: Use whole grains whenever possible, as they have increased health benefits; farro easily replaces Arborio rice and results in a similar final product.



1. **parch the rice in fat** in a heavy-gauge saucepan, sautoir, or rondeau after sweating the aromatics. Onions and other aromatic vegetables should be given sufficient time to sweat in the hot butter to fully develop their flavor. In some risottos, a cooked onion purée is used instead of chopped onions. Spices, either left whole or ground, may be added at this point as well. (If using saffron, infuse it into the cooking liquid for best flavor and color.)

Cooking the rice in the fat produces the correct finished texture in the risotto. Once a toasted aroma becomes apparent, stir in the first addition of liquid.

method in detail »



2. **add the simmering liquid** in parts. Add one-quarter to one-third of the cooking liquid to the parched rice and stir constantly over medium heat until the liquid is absorbed. Continue adding portions of the cooking liquid in this manner. After the rice absorbs the first addition of the liquid, the grains appear firm and quite distinct, and no real creaminess is evident yet. After the rice absorbs the second addition of liquid, the grains appear more tender and they begin to adopt a creamy, sauce-like consistency.

3. **stir constantly** until the entire amount of liquid has been incorporated, the rice is fully cooked, and the risotto is creamy and thick without becoming mushy. The average cooking time for risotto prepared with Arborio rice is 20 minutes.

Although the best risotto is prepared from start to finish just prior to service, it is possible to partially cook the dish in advance. To do this, remove the risotto from the heat after the rice has absorbed $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total amount of cooking liquid. Pour the risotto onto a sheet pan and spread it in an even layer. Cool it rapidly and refrigerate. To finish risotto held in this manner, add the final one-quarter to one-third of the cooking liquid to a saucepan or sautoir and warm. Return all the parcooked risotto to the pot with the warmed cooking liquid and heat it over medium heat. Finish cooking until the risotto is creamy and the rice is fully cooked. This can also be done by the portion.



4. **vigorously stir** butter and grated cheese or other finishing ingredients into the risotto over low heat until well blended. Some garnish ingredients may be added early in the cooking process so that they fully cook along with the risotto. Others may be cooked separately and added at the end. (Refer to specific recipes for details.) Add fresh herbs, if desired, adjust the seasoning, and serve the risotto on heated plates.

Evaluate the quality of the finished risotto. Italians describe a properly cooked risotto as *all'onda* (“wave-like”), meaning that the risotto has a creamy, almost porridge-like consistency, but individual grains are slightly firm with a discernable texture. Risotto that has been cooked over too high heat or too rapidly will not develop the proper consistency, nor will it be adequately cooked. The finished consistency should be creamy and the risotto grains should be *al dente*.



Black Bean Mash

Makes 10 servings

2 lb/907 g dried black beans
6 qt/5.76 L water or Chicken Stock (page 263), or as needed
2 bay leaves
2 tsp/4 g dried oregano
Salt, as needed
4 fl oz/120 mL olive oil
8 oz/227 g medium-dice onions
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 tbsp/6 g ground cumin
2 tbsp/6 g chopped oregano
Ground black pepper, as needed

1. Sort the beans and rinse well with cold water. Soak the beans using the long or short method (see page 753).
2. Drain the soaked beans.
3. Combine the beans and water in a medium stockpot and add the bay leaves and dried oregano. Simmer for 1 hour.
4. Add salt and continue to simmer until the beans are tender to the bite, 20 to 30 minutes.
5. Remove the bay leaves, strain any excess liquid from the beans, and reduce it until syrupy.
6. Heat the oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the onions and garlic and sweat until tender. Add the cumin and chopped oregano and stir to combine.
7. Combine the beans with the onion mixture and purée in a blender (working in batches if necessary). If the mixture becomes too thick to process, add the reduced bean liquid to thin it out. Season with salt and pepper.
8. Serve immediately or hold warm for service.

Black Beans with Peppers and Chorizo

Makes 10 servings

12 oz/340 g dried black beans
3 qt/2.88 L water or Chicken Stock (page 263)
Salt, as needed
2 fl oz/60 mL vegetable oil
3 oz/85 g minced bacon
6 oz/170 g medium-dice onion
2 tsp/6 g minced garlic
4 oz/113 g sliced Mexican chorizo
3 oz/85 g medium-dice red pepper
3 oz/85 g medium-dice green pepper
2 oz/57 g sliced green onions, plus additional for garnish
1 tbsp/3 g chopped oregano
1 tbsp/3 g roughly chopped cilantro
Ground black pepper, as needed
5 fl oz/150 mL sour cream (optional)

1. Sort the beans and rinse well with cold water. Soak the beans using the long or short method (see page 753). Drain.
2. Combine the beans and water in a medium pot. Simmer the beans for 1 hour.
3. Add salt and continue to simmer until the beans are tender to the bite, 20 to 30 minutes. Set the beans aside in their cooking liquid.
4. In a large saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat and add the bacon. Cook until the bacon fat is rendered. Add the onions and sauté until tender and lightly browned, about 8 minutes. Add the garlic and cook 1 minute more, stirring frequently.
5. Add the chorizo and peppers and sauté, stirring frequently, until the peppers are tender, 6 to 8 minutes.
6. Drain the beans and add them with enough cooking liquid to keep them moist (the consistency should be that of a thick stew). You may need to add more liquid intermittently during the rest of the cooking process. Simmer the beans until the flavors have developed and all the ingredients are heated through.
7. Add the green onions and herbs and season with salt and pepper. Serve the beans with sour cream, if desired.



Black Beans with Peppers and Chorizo