



Mushroom Risotto

By Susan Spungen

Serves 4

You've got to use your instincts when cooking risotto because there are so many variables: the size and shape of the pan (a low, wide saucepan is best), the type and heat level of your stove, etc. It isn't difficult to cook—it just requires some attention and care, and it helps to know what you are looking for. The rice should always be thinly veiled in liquid and bubbling energetically. When the liquid's absorbed, add some more. The exact amount isn't important. And contrary to lore, it does not need to be stirred constantly, just frequently. You don't need to chain yourself to the stove—you can absolutely make a salad or set the table while you are cooking this. Stir more frequently and more vigorously in the second half of the cooking. This is when the grains begin to release their starch, which will help the rice be its creamiest. If you can find oyster, maitake, or chanterelle mushrooms, by all means use them! Although risotto is usually a one-pot affair, I think it's easiest to sauté the extra mushrooms in a separate pan before adding.

- 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
 - 8 ounces cremini (baby bella) or shiitake mushrooms, trimmed and sliced
 - 3 ½ cups chicken or vegetable stock
 - 2 to 3 tablespoons butter, divided
 - 1 medium shallot, minced
 - 1 ½ cups arborio rice
 - 1/2 cup dry white wine
 - 2 ounces grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for serving
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1. Put the dried mushrooms in a large spouted measuring cup or deep medium bowl and pour 2 cups boiling water over the mushrooms. Stir to make sure they are all wet. Set aside to cool.
2. Heat a large (12-inch) skillet over high heat. Add 1 tablespoon oil and the fresh mushrooms. Sprinkle lightly with salt, and toss to coat evenly with the oil. Cook, stirring frequently, for 3 to 4 minutes, or until golden brown on the edges. Set aside in the pan.
3. After 15 minutes, scoop the dried mushrooms out of the water, squeezing excess liquid out. Chop mushrooms finely and set aside. Reserve the liquid.
4. Put the stock and the reserved mushroom liquid (you should have 1 ½ cups left) in a small saucepan on the back burner of the stove. Bring to a simmer, turn down to keep warm, and cover until ready to use. Have a soup ladle ready.
5. Heat a medium saucepan that is more wide than deep over medium heat, and add 1 tablespoon butter and 1 tablespoon oil. Add the shallots, and cook 2 to 3 minutes until translucent. Turn down the heat if they threaten to brown.
6. Add rice and the reserved chopped mushrooms and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring until the grains look slightly translucent. Add wine and cook until nearly absorbed, about 1 minute.
7. Add a ladleful of stock (it should be just enough to barely cover the surface of the rice). Cook at a lively simmer, stirring very frequently, until it's nearly absorbed, 2 to 3 minutes. Continue adding stock in this way until rice is very creamy, but still al dente, 15 to 20 minutes total. You may not need all of the liquid, but you will probably use most of it.
8. Rewarm the fresh mushrooms, and stir half of them into the risotto. Stir in the remaining butter (1 to 2 tablespoons—your choice) and the cheese, and add salt and pepper to taste. Add more of the remaining liquid if needed to loosen (it should be a tiny bit soupy), and divide among warmed shallow bowls. Top with remaining mushrooms.

Cooking tips and variations

- If you don't want to dirty an extra pan, you can omit the fresh mushrooms. There will still be plenty of mushroom flavor from the dried porcini.
- Taste your stock mixture before you start adding it to the rice. Add salt if needed, because this is your best chance to season from the inside out!
- There are other kinds of rice that can be used for risotto, like Carnaroli or Vialone Nano. Many people consider these to be superior for the creamiest risotto, but Arborio is what you'll probably find in your supermarket, and it will do just fine.
- Keep the stock covered while you're getting everything ready so you can maintain the quantity. You don't want it boiling away!
- There should be just a little more liquid than you need. If you do run out, you can add water at the end, but heat it first!
- Never add cream to risotto—the creaminess comes from the starch in the rice. When you add the butter and cheese at the end, it will get very creamy!