

Seasonal Eating
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Spring Comfort in a Risotto
April 2016

My grandfather was born and raised in Western Michigan and as a young adult he worked on an asparagus farm. So my family has always had asparagus on the table, although I never really appreciated it until I was grown and started roasting it in the oven. It is a great spring vegetable that can be used in so many ways from cream of asparagus soup to appetizers rolled in phyllo dough to a main dish stir fry.

Asparagus is a good source of vitamins C and A and is high in folate. Many people believe that the thinner the asparagus, the more tender. Actually tenderness is determined by maturity and freshness. Thin spears don't get any thicker as they grow, the spears come out of the ground whatever thickness they will remain. Male plants and older plants generally produce thicker spears. You can trim the more fibrous ends of the asparagus by cutting them off or by bending the asparagus and letting it snap where it becomes tender.

With asparagus, the rule is the fresher, the better! So try to use what you purchase as quickly as possible. Look for spears that are uniform color with tight heads and no drying at the cut ends or shriveling which indicate that the spears are not as fresh.

One of my favorite comfort dishes is Risotto. Short grained rice cooked with wine and broth and stirred almost constantly to release the starch into a creamy sauce. You can add whatever ingredients you like to risotto and some of my favorites are mushrooms and kale in the fall or peas and asparagus in the spring. Arborio rice is a short grain rice that has more starch than long grain and is ideal for making risotto. The key is to have a saucepan of warm broth to add by the ladleful to the cooking rice and to stir, stir, stir.

Shrimp and asparagus combine for a spring version of this classic Italian dish. Heat up some crusty bread and toss together a fruit salad for a perfect weekend dinner and enjoy the asparagus as it comes in the next few months.

If you need more ideas for your spring produce, check out the seasonal eating page at the Bedford County Extension website (bedford.tennessee.edu).

Shrimp and Asparagus Risotto

- 1 bunch asparagus spears
- Olive oil
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 12 ounces medium raw shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1 teaspoon Cajun seasoning
- 1/8 teaspoon paprika
- 5 cups chicken broth
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder



1/4 teaspoon lemon pepper seasoning
1/8 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 cup arborio rice
1/2 cup white wine
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Trim asparagus ends and toss with a little olive oil, salt and pepper. Place in a single layer on a baking sheet and roast at 400 degrees until crisp tender, about 10-15 minutes. Cut into 1" sections and set aside. In a saucepan, heat the chicken broth to simmering. Meanwhile toss shrimp with Cajun seasoning, paprika and a sprinkle of salt. Heat a tablespoon of oil in a large skillet and add shrimp in a single layer. Cook just until it turns pink and is opaque in the middle, about 3-5 minutes, turning over once. Remove and set aside. In same skillet, add another tablespoon of oil and add onion, cooking until translucent. Add garlic, onion powder, lemon pepper and turmeric and stir another minute. Add rice and stir to coat. Add wine and cook until almost all of the liquid is absorbed. Add a ladle or two of the simmering chicken broth and stir. When the liquid is almost absorbed, add another ladle, stirring frequently to release the starch from the rice. Continue adding ladlefuls, stirring and letting them absorb until the rice is tender, about 45 minutes. You may not need all of the chicken broth (or if you need more just use some hot water). When the rice is tender, add the cheese, asparagus and shrimp and heat through. Serve immediately.