

Seasonal Eating
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.Turn Rice into a Comforting Winter Meal
January 2022

Chicken and rice is one of my favorite soups. I love rice anyway - probably more than potatoes. I like rice pilaf, brown rice with its nutty flavor and chewy texture, wild rice with its earthiness, sticky rice with Asian dishes - you name it, I'll eat it! One way especially that I love rice is in a risotto.

Risotto is a method of cooking rice that is very popular in Italy. Short grain or medium grain rice is full of starch which releases when stirred and cooked with a liquid and creates a beautiful, silky textured sauce with the softened rice grains suspended in it. It's magical, creamy and comforting. The Arborio rice variety is easy to find locally and is what I use. Long grain rice, which is what most Americans are used to using, has a different structure and type of starch that keeps it fluffy and in individual grains, which is preferable for some dishes but not risotto. The key is adding the broth slowly and stirring, stirring, stirring to create the luxurious texture.



The great thing about risotto is that you can use whatever flavorings and add-ins that you have on hand. I have made saffron risotto, kale and mushroom risotto and asparagus and shrimp risotto. Going back to my favorite soup of chicken and rice, I used these flavors in the risotto recipe below for comfort food on a cold day.

To make the flavors of chicken soup, start by sauteing carrots, onions, celery and mushrooms in olive oil. This is my go-to base for chicken soup. Add the chicken and then come the seasonings of black pepper, thyme and poultry seasoning (which has the characteristic flavor of sage). Next is a big splash of white wine - like a chardonnay. Let it cook down until almost dry to get the alcohol out and the flavor infused in the vegetables. Next comes the rice and then the broth - ladleful by ladleful.

I keep the broth in another saucepan, warm on the stovetop. Add a ladleful to the rice mixture and stir over medium to medium high heat. When almost all of the liquid is absorbed, add another ladleful of the warm broth and continue to stir. Continue like this until the rice is softened (taste it once in a while to see if it still has a hard center or is softened all the way through) and you have a creamy, gel like consistency. You may need a little more or less broth, depending on your exact type of rice, amount of heat, etc. and it will take 30-40 minutes or so to cook.

The finishing touch is a little butter and grated Parmesan cheese. Don't add any salt to your risotto until the end because the broth, the chicken and the cheese all have sodium and it can easily become overly salty

So do give risotto a try using whatever herbs and add-ins you like. It makes such a comforting winter meal. For more information and recipes check out the Seasonal Eating page at bedford.tennessee.edu.

Chicken Soup Risotto

2 tablespoons olive oil
1/4 cup chopped carrot
1/2 small onion, chopped
2 ribs celery, chopped
5 mushrooms, chopped
1 (10-ounce) can chicken, drained
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
1/2 teaspoon poultry seasoning
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
1/4 cup white wine
1 cup arborio rice
4 cups chicken broth, warmed
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 tablespoon butter

In a medium saucepan, heat the olive oil. Add the carrot, onion, celery and mushrooms. Cook over medium high heat until softened and liquid has evaporated. Add the pepper, thyme, poultry seasoning, parsley and wine. Cook until wine is almost cooked dry. Add the rice, stirring to combine. Add the chicken broth a ladleful at a time, stirring the rice very frequently. When the liquid is absorbed, add another ladleful, stirring and repeating until the rice is tender and creamy (you may or may not use all of the broth). Stir in the Parmesan cheese and butter. Serve immediately in flat bowls.