

Red wine risotto with radicchio and Gorgonzola

Serves 4 as a main course or 6-8 as a starter.

Preparation time: 15 mins

Cooking time: 30 mins

Ingredients:

5 large shallots, finely diced (more if small)

2 sticks celery, finely diced

2 large garlic cloves, crushed and finely chopped

1 level tsp chopped fresh rosemary (optional)

extra virgin olive oil

approx 2 tbsps / 30g unsalted butter

8 heaped handfuls Arborio rice

4 large glasses good Italian dry red wine, eg Rosso di Montalcino

approx 1-1½ pints good chicken stock

1 head radicchio, thinly sliced

2 handfuls grated Parmesan

150g Gorgonzola

1 handful walnuts

approx 20 fresh sage leaves

salt & pepper



Method:

1. Prepare ingredients: Peel and finely dice shallots, celery and garlic. Wash and chop rosemary. Cut radicchio in half, remove tough stem from centre and then thinly slice. Rinse in a colander if needed. Toast the walnut halves in a small quantity of olive oil either in a frying pan or under the grill, approx 3 mins. Leave to one side on kitchen paper. When cool crumble slightly into chunks.
2. Gently fry shallots and celery in half the butter and a slug of olive oil until soft, approx 5 mins. Add garlic and rosemary (if using) half-way through. While cooking prepare chicken stock. It should be hot, ready for use.
3. Add rice and stir. Add red wine two glasses at a time, stirring slowly all the time so that the first quantity is absorbed before adding the second.
4. Add chicken stock, one ladle at a time, stirring almost continuously so that the stock is nearly fully absorbed before adding the next ladle. This will take approx 15-20 mins.

5. Meanwhile, gently fry sage leaves in 2-3 tbsps olive oil until crisp, but not burnt. Approx 3 mins. Leave leaves to dry on kitchen paper and retain oil.
6. Add radicchio, Parmesan and half the walnuts. Stir and cook for another 2-3 mins until the radicchio is soft. If needed, add more stock or boiling water to bring the risotto to the perfect consistency. The rice should be cooked through but retain a slight nuttiness. The risotto should be loose and sloppy rather than stodgy.
7. To finish off the risotto stir in remaining butter, Gorgonzola (broken into chunks) and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. The Gorgonzola will be quite salty, so taste and season the risotto after adding it. Let the Gorgonzola remain in blobs rather than mixing it in completely.
8. To serve, mound the risotto on plates and garnish with the fried sage leaves, the remaining walnuts and a drizzle of the sage-infused olive oil. Serve on its own or with a green salad.

Risotto made with red wine and/or radicchio is a classic Italian dish. This version is an attempt to recreate the one I had at La Badia restaurant outside Orvieto, Umbria, with my friends Libby and Tim the week before their wedding.

Radicchio facts:

- Has a bitter and spicy taste which mellows when cooked. Try grilling or roasting it with extra virgin olive oil, lemon and salt.
- Pliny the Elder thought it was a blood purifier and aid for insomniacs. In fact it contains *intybin*, a blood and liver tonic.
- Varieties are named after different regions in Italy. *Radicchio Rosso di Treviso* (chicory-shaped) is said to be the best. *Radicchio Rosso di Chioggia* (cabbage-shaped) is more common, and also good. *Tardivo* and *Castelfranco* varieties are white and flower-shaped.
- Its familiar purple-white colour is achieved by up-rooting the plants and finishing their growth indoors. The plants have their outer leaves removed and are placed in darkened sheds with their roots in water. The lack of light inhibits the production of chlorophyll and causes the leaves to turn white and wine-red.

Gorgonzola facts:

- A blue/green-veined Italian cheese made from unskimmed cows' milk in Piedmont and Lombardy. It has Protected Designated Origin. To verify your cheese, find the . symbol impression on the inside of its foil wrapper.
- It has a distinctive flavour which is both creamy and piquant. There are two types – sweet and piquant. The former is smoother and more mellow, and the latter is firmer and more pungent. The consistency and flavour are determined by the length of ageing: 2+ months for sweet Gorgonzola and 3+ months for piquant Gorgonzola.