

Pancetta, Leek & Asparagus Risotto

Swick

Serves 1 | Active Time: 50 minutes | Total Time: 50 minutes

Step 1: Preparing Your Mise en Place

- 5 cups stock (see note)
- 1/2 tsp sea salt (or to taste)
- 1 bunch fresh asparagus
- 1/3 cup leeks (whites only)
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1/4 cup pancetta
- 3 to 4 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 cup risotto rice (see note)
- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup white wine or vermouth
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese (optional)

Note: For the liquid, use a light chicken or vegetable stock. If your stock is very strong in flavor, you can use a combination of 1/2 water and 1/2 stock so you don't over power the flavor of the rice. Always keep in mind that more or less liquid may be needed to cook this dish. It's always better to have too much than not enough.

To prepare your mise en place, first place the liquid into a pot, season with the salt (if needed) and bring to a boil.

In the meantime, wash and trim the asparagus. Cut into approximately 1" to 1.5" - inch pieces. Set up an ice bath. Par-cook the asparagus in the cooking liquid. Once the asparagus is almost tender, transfer it to the ice bath to stop the cooking process. Once cool, drain and set aside. Reduce the heat to low to keep the cooking liquid hot.

Next, finely dice the leeks, garlic and pancetta. Remove the leaves from the thyme.

Note: For this dish, it is important to use rice that is suitable for risotto.

Measure out the rice, olive oil and white wine. Finely grate the parmesan cheese, if using. Set everything aside.

Step 2: Starting the Risotto

Place the oil into a large, heavy-bottomed pan and heat over medium to medium-low heat.

Add the leeks, pancetta and thyme, along with a pinch of salt. Sweat for about 5 minutes or so until the leeks are soft and translucent. Next, add 1/4 cup of the hot cooking liquid to soften the leeks further. Let the cooking liquid completely evaporate before moving onto the next step.

Step 3: Toasting the Rice & Deglazing

Once the liquid has completely evaporated, turn the heat up to medium-high and add the rice all at once. Stir to coat the rice in the hot fat. Monitor the heat so the aromatics do not burn. Toast the rice for a few minutes until the perimeter of the grains are translucent.

Once toasted, add the garlic and cook, stirring just until the garlic is fragrant, about 30 seconds. Deglaze with the wine. Stir the rice until the wine evaporates.

Step 4: Cooking the Risotto

Once the wine has evaporated, slowly add the hot liquid cup by cup. Stir often to draw the starches out of the rice. Adjust the heat so the liquid is always gently boiling. Once the liquid has been absorbed, then and only then, add the next cup. Stir frequently.

Continue to add liquid and cook the risotto until it reaches the al dente stage (or until it is done to your liking). Start tasting the rice for doneness around the 15 minute mark.

Step 5: Finishing the Risotto

- extra-virgin olive oil (for finishing)
- parmesan cheese (optional)

Once the risotto has been cooked to your liking, taste it for seasoning. Stir in the butter (or olive oil) and cheese. Fold in the asparagus. Cover and let rest for 1 to 2 minutes.

Just before serving, add a bit of hot liquid to loosen the consistency, if necessary. Plate on warmed dishes and drizzle with a bit of olive oil and grated parmesan cheese. Serve immediately.