

Fifty Shades of White

by John Rizzo

Telling you that rice is an important staple food consumed all over the world isn't exactly a newflash. Considered a cereal grain, it is a type of grass in the same family as other grains such as wheat and corn. Although corn is the largest produced grain worldwide, rice is the largest produced grain for human consumption. It provides more than one fifth of all calories consumed by humans.

Rice contains a number of vitamins and minerals, but if you are looking for the healthiest choice when purchasing rice, you should consider brown rice, which is basically white rice in its purest form. Processes called milling and polishing remove the outermost layers of bran and germ. Unfortunately along with this come the essential healthy fats, most of the B Vitamins, manganese and phosphorous –not to mention the almost all of the dietary fiber.

There are over 120,000 varieties of rice worldwide and is generally classified in three groups: long-grain, medium-grain and short-grain.

Long-grain varieties include:

- American long-grain and American long-grain brown. These are the most common types purchased in the United States for domestic cooking. The grains are somewhat fluffy and do not tend to stick together if cooked properly.
- Basmati. The predominant rice found in Indian and Pakistani cuisine.
- Jasmine. From Thailand, this translucent grain has a slightly floral aroma when cooked.

Medium-grain varieties include:

- Japanese sushi rice. This rice is firm and somewhat sticky when cooked
- Bomba. This is a common Spanish rice that can absorb as much as twice the liquid as long-grain rice.

Short-grain rice includes:

- Arborio. This Italian rice is used to make the creamy rice dish risotto.
- Short grain brown rice. This also contains a large amount of starch that makes this it somewhat sticky.

Choosing the right rice for recipe is essential. The below recipe for risotto, a creamy Italian rice dish, is made with Arborio rice. It's natural properties give it the ability to absorb a lot of liquid while releasing starch giving a creamy texture to the dish.

Risotto

Yield: 6 Cups

Chicken Stock	4 Cups	Arborio Rice	1 Cup
Olive Oil	2 TBL	Dry White Wine	1/4 Cup
Onions, Yellow	1 small	Parmesan Cheese, Grated	1/4 Cup
Crimini Mushroom	8 oz.	Bay Leaf	1
Garlic, Minced	1/2 tsp.	Fresh Parsley, chopped	2 TBL

The key to making good risotto is patience. If you are not willing to stand at the stove throughout most of this process, I would strongly recommend that you abort...now!

Heat the olive oil in a heavy saucepan and sauté the diced onion until soft. Add the raw rice and sauté it for about 2 minutes until its opaque. This process keeps the rice from sticking together. Add the wine and stir the mixture until it's all absorbed.

Add the mushrooms, garlic, bay leaf, and 1 cup of the chicken stock. Cook over a low to medium heat continuously stirring until almost all of the liquid is absorbed. Continue to add one cup of chicken stock at a time, repeating the above procedure until all of the stock is incorporated. This will take several minutes.

The risotto should be somewhat firm and have a creamy texture. Add the parmesan cheese, fresh parsley and salt and pepper to taste; serve immediately.