

## risotto (rice italian style)

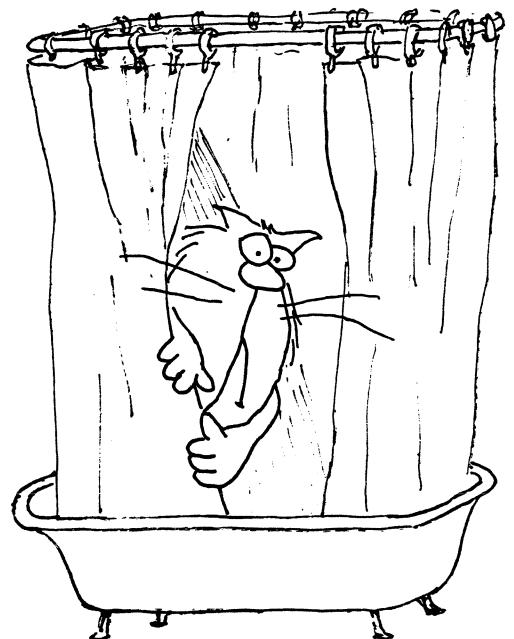


No, you don't have to go to Italy to enjoy Italian style rice. You don't even have to search Italian markets for special Italian "arborio" rice. Besides, not all of us are lucky enough to live within an ICBM flight time of South Philly (Yo!) or the North End or Little Italy. And for those of us who do, where do you park when you get there? (No problem for an ICBM, but the bobmobile has major problems in this department.)

So just think thick and creamy and you're halfway there. What? Thick and creamy rice? If that sounds wierd to you, you have yet to experience the delicious possibilities ordinary rice can offer. It's not just that dull white grainy stuff that sticks together in Chinese restaurants and doesn't in most American kitchens except by accident. Rice likes cheese and vegetables and wine and moisture.

Isn't it hard to step out from under that driving hot shower in the morning? Think how the rice feels when you evaporate all the water! Ouch.

So give it a try. You won't regret it. Besides, this is an offer you can't refuse. The dr bob enforcer squad gives its personal guarantee. Don't make us back it up, if you know what I mean.



**some general comments.** Italian "arborio" rice is a shortgrained rice (the grains are short, compared to the ones which are long) which is ideal for risotto but must be substituted by a longgrained American rice because of cooking characteristics. The wisdom is, use Carolina long grained rice, or even Uncle Ben's converted rice, although Uncle Ben's doesn't suck up water as good (well). Note that conversion is not a religious experience here, folks — it just means the rice got worked over to retain more of the stuff that's good for you. Brown rice fanatics can consider adapting these recipes to the longer cooking times of brown rice. We haven't since we're not, although we probably should be. If you're in a jam, even generic rice in a unmarked plastic bag will probably work, as our experience has revealed.



**thirst satisfaction.** Every cup of rice will suck up from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 cups of boiling water. We start by getting about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  cups going in a big teapot on a backburner, but once it gets active, reduce the heat to the barely boiling point or you may come up short. (No surprise, water evaporates under duress.)

<b>phase one.</b>	1 cup rice	3 or 4 tablespoons butter
	1 medium onion	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup decent white wine (option)

Most versions of risotto start the same way. Take one medium onion, maybe on the smallish side of medium, and grate it with one of those vertical cheese graters that looks like a long perforated cow bell with no clanger. Saute the onion in about 3 or 4 tablespoons of butter until tender, about 5 minutes. Then stir in the rice and continue moving it around for about a minute to wake it up. As a humanitarian gesture, throw in the wine to kill the pain. (Ignore pleas for mercy.) Cook another minute or so until absorbed.

If you're gonna toss in anything later which will overpower this subtle addition to the flavor, you might as well skip this last step.

**phase two.**      3½ cups water, barely boiling but eager  
1 chicken bouillon cube  
optional throwins (see ADDins)

Throw in 2½ cups of nearly boiling water and the bouillon cube. (You may have noticed the "i" shifting position in "bouillon" – we read the package to get it right, but it still looks funny. French, a language we gave up on because of the spelling.) Stir around, bring to a boil and simmer uncovered about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Watch towards the end that the rice stays creamy and flowing when stirred. Add in more water if necessary to maintain this state.

Conventional wisdom is, you are supposed to add in the water half a cup to a cup at a time depending on how much rice you started with (1 to 2 cups). If you are not lazy (as indeed we often are), add 1 cup first and then as the rice gradually absorbs the water, add another partial cup and so on, making sure the rice is still creamy at the end of this phase. Purists will know the time is up using the "al dente" taste test, an acquired skill, not just for pasta. They would probably even use real chicken stock instead of our pathetic bouillon cube and boiling water. But how many times have you looked in the fridge and found chicken stock. As for the taste test, skip it and use a timer.

**phase three.** Remove from heat. Add in a tablespoon of butter, salt and pepper to taste and at least ½ cup freshly grated parmesan cheese (absolutely none of the fake stuff is allowed!). Cover but serve within minutes. Timing is critical – it won't wait till you're ready, so plan well. Remember it will stiffen up a little in this brief period before hitting your plate, so its better to end phase two too creamy than not.

**ADDins** □ If you throw in a little saffron in phase two and stir around, you get to call this "risotto milanese". The dr bob team imports the stuff dirt cheap from Italy so we have no problem with this, but when you check out the outrageous price at your supermarket, you may pass on this option. You can also throw in a little cream or half and half in phase three if that's no problem for your diet.

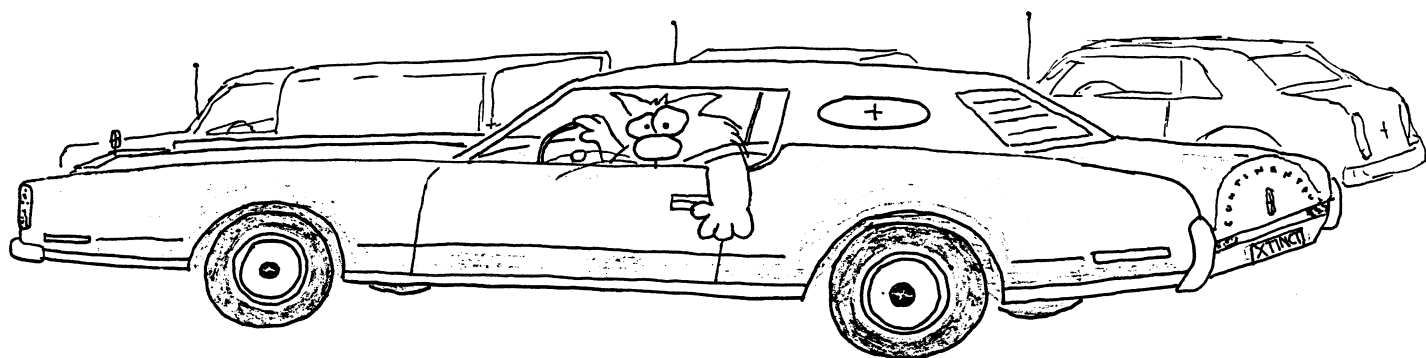
□ If you don't mind shortcuts, adding in anywhere from half to a full can of cream of celery soup, preheated without liquid, lets you call it "cheat risotto con sedano." Half a can of condensed soup in the fridge is easily forgotten so we often throw in the whole can. This may be too much for your taste. You can also cheat with other creamy condensed soups. Cream of mushroom / shrimp / chicken. Skip the wine though.

□ If you hold the parmesan, salt and pepper, but stir in some butter (a few tablespoons) and about half a cup of fontina cubed about a centimeter on a side ( $\frac{3}{8}$  inch for diehard Americans), you can call it "risotto con fontina" but you have to pronounce it like you were telling a conehead to "phone Tina." While we're on the subject, risotto is "ree-zoté-toe." Va bene?

□ You may also opt for risotto con zucchini. Saute up a couple of narrow zucchini thinly sliced crossways and toss 'em in during phase two or even together with the onion. If you're lazy, just grate 'em up raw and throw the suckers in uncooked during phase two - they'll cook with the rice. Once you decide you like this stuff, you can track down new variations in Italian cookbooks: plum tomatoes, mushrooms, asparagus, spinach, gorgonzola, meat broth and red wine, salmon cream sauce, ...; use your imagination.

phase four. The dr bob team has invented a foolproof method of reviving leftover risotto. Boil a little water in a silverstone frying pan and breakup the risotto (refrigerator rigamortis has set in) with a spatula, massaging it a bit until it relaxes and gets creamy again. You only need enough water to momentarily return the risotto to a liquid state before the excess water takes a hike. If you goof with too much water, no problem, just simmer it away. And then enjoy.

Or else.



bobmobile on South Philly Eighth Street Runway awaiting gate parking instructions from ground traffic control