

Broad Bean & Fennel Risotto

with Braised Asparagus

My family loves risotto so much it has become a welcome staple in our dinner rotation. It is creamy, rich and satisfying, and also very adaptable, making use of whatever garden produce happens to be on hand.

Risotto is very cheap and simple to make, but because you must slowly add the stock to the rice as it cooks you need to be able to give it your full attention. However, this is an opportunity to bring some mindfulness into the kitchen through slow cooking, which can be very relaxing after a long day. I tend to put on some music, pour myself a glass of wine and enjoy the comforting ritual of ladling stock and stirring rice.

You might want to balance the richness of this risotto by accompanying it with a crisp garden salad – try my *Seasonal Salad with Honey Mustard Dressing*.

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 6 cups vegetable stock
- 250 grams fresh asparagus
- 25 grams butter
- 1 – 2 small baby fennel bulbs (optional – if you can't source it you can leave it out)
- 25 grams butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 cup arborio rice
- 25 grams butter
- 1 cup of fresh young podded broad beans
- 2 handfuls of fresh rocket
- 50 grams parmesan or tasty cheddar cheese
- 25 grams butter

Method

1. The first thing you want to do is get your stock on to the heat, so that when you come to add it, it is nice and hot. Bring it up to the boil, then cover and turn off the heat.
2. The next thing you will do is prepare the asparagus, so it is ready to cook while you are finishing your risotto. Wash the spears and place them into a pan with the first measure of butter and a good splash of water. Cover with a lid and set aside until it is time to cook it.

3. Finally slice the baby fennel bulbs and stems. Finely chop the feathery leaves and reserve them to use later.
4. Heat the second measure of butter and olive oil and gently sauté the onion, garlic and fennel bulbs/stems with a pinch of sea salt until the onion is translucent and soft. Add the arborio rice and cook over a medium – low heat for a couple of minutes, stirring.
5. Turn the heat up to medium and begin slowly adding the hot stock to the pan one ladleful at a time. You want to cook the rice slowly and you only want to add the next ladle of stock once the first ladle has been fully absorbed, as this is what will give your risotto a silky creamy consistency. Stir the rice continuously, making sure you are not breaking or mashing up the grains. I usually stir with a wooden spoon in a figure 8 pattern, going around the edge of the pan every now and then to catch the outside grains. This process of adding the stock and stirring the rice does take time and you must be very present, but it is a lovely soothing way to relax and reflect while in the kitchen.
6. When it is time to add your last ladle of stock, add the broad beans to the risotto and continue stirring. This is also a good time to turn the asparagus on to cook. Bring it up to a simmer with the lid on, then remove the lid and gently braise the asparagus in the liquid, basting with the butter every now and then. Cook until just tender. Season and set aside.
7. Once all the stock has been absorbed in your risotto the rice should be cooked but still firm to the bite. If you find you don't quite have enough stock, you can add a bit of hot water if needed. Remove from the heat and gently fold through the fennel and rocket leaves, grated parmesan and the third measure of butter.
8. Season with sea salt and lots of black pepper and serve immediately, topping each plate with some asparagus spears.

***top tip – if you don't have any stock on hand, you can bring 6 cups of water up to the heat with ½ teaspoon of vegemite dissolved into it. This won't have quite the same depth as a traditional vegetable stock, but it is a good substitute to add that umami flavour into the risotto.*