

Caramelized Fennel & Onion Risotto

1 cups arborio rice
2½ cups chicken stock (homemade or a GF brand – like Pacific Natural Foods)
½ small onion, chopped (about ½ cup)
½ small fennel bulb, chopped (about ¾ cup)
2 tablespoons olive oil
¼ cup grated Parmigiano Reggiano
salt and pepper

If you're going to bake the risotto preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

While you're caramelizing the vegetables heat the chicken broth. Bring it to a simmer and then turn off the burner. You don't want it to keep simmering or it will evaporate but, remember, it does need to be hot.

Coarse chop the onion and fennel. For the fennel: wash it, then cut off the stalks and the bottom. Cut the bulb in half and remove the core. Slice the fennel in ¼ inch slices then chop it a few times so the pieces are about ½ to ¾ inch long.

Heat the oil in a heavy saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and fennel and cook, stirring, until they are a nicely browned, about 8-10 minutes. You do not want the fennel and onions to steam so make sure your pan is big enough--they need a little bit of space to caramelize.

Add the rice and cook, stirring to coat the grains with oil, for a few minutes.

Finish the recipe in one of the two following ways...

Traditional

Stir in about 1/2 cup hot chicken broth and a pinch of salt. Simmer until the broth has completely evaporated, about 1 minute. (It's important to keep the heat at the right temperature--you want a medium simmer so the rice doesn't cook too quickly--so you may need to turn the burner down to medium.) Add in the remaining chicken stock about a half a cup at a time, making sure the rice never gets dry but not adding more stock until the rice has absorbed the liquid. Stir the risotto the entire time you are adding the stock. This should take about 20-25 minutes.

I always test the risotto before finishing it up. Make sure it's the consistency you like – a little al dente or soft. If you like it soft you may need to add a little more broth (or even water) and continue to cook until it reaches your desired consistency.

Take the risotto off the heat. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add the grated cheese, if desired. Mix together and then let sit for 5 minutes before serving.

Oven-baked

Stir in about 1/2 cup hot chicken broth and simmer until it has completely evaporated. (If you're going to transfer to a baking dish now's the time to do it.) Add 1½ cups chicken broth, salt, and pepper. Bring to a rapid simmer. Cover, transfer to the oven, and bake, until the rice has absorbed most of the liquid, 20 to 25 minutes.

Check the risotto to be sure it's the consistency you desire – al dente or soft. (If you like it al dente you may want to check it at about 20 minutes.) Remove it from the oven when it's done to your liking. Stir in the remaining 1/2 cup of broth, salt, pepper, and cheese (if desired) and mix thoroughly. Let it sit for about 5 minutes before serving.

This recipe makes about 4 servings.