

Artichoke Risotto With Lemon-Herb Pesto

serves 4

For the Pesto

1 small bunch fresh basil (about 2oz) – leaves removed from stems
6 springs fresh Italian parsley – stems removed
1 large garlic clove – skinned and left whole
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest (use microplane grater)
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1/2 teaspoon sea salt

For the Risotto

1 lemon – juiced
3 large artichokes
3 1/2 cups spring water
3 cups vegetable broth in cartons
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 medium red onion – skinned, quartered and finely sliced
2 large garlic cloves – skinned and finely chopped
1 cup dry white wine
1 cup Carnaroli, Vialone or Arborio rice
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 tablespoon cold, unsalted butter
1/3 cup freshly grated Reggiano parmesan

extra virgin olive oil for drizzling
chive tips as garnish

Step 1: For the pesto - place the basil leaves, Italian parsley, garlic, lemon zest, olive oil and salt in the bowl of a food processor. Process at high speed until it forms a paste, scraping down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula, once or twice. Transfer to a bowl, cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Step 2: For the artichokes - fill a medium bowl with cold water and add the lemon juice. Trim the artichokes by bending back the outer leaves until they snap off close to the base. Repeat until all the green leaves are gone, leaving the tender yellow-green inner leaves attached to the heart. Cut 2" of the tops so that only the yellow part of the leaves are left. Cut the stalk at the base of the artichoke. Using a vegetable hand-peeler, peel any green part around the heart. Keep dipping the artichokes in the lemon-water bath as you work to prevent them from browning. Quarter the artichokes, remove the chokes and then cut in 1/4" slices. Place in the lemon-water bath. Peel the stalks with the vegetable hand-peeler to remove all green parts. Cut in half lengthwise, then cut in 1/4" slices and place the in the lemon-water bath. Set aside until ready to use.

Step 3: For the broth – place the spring water and vegetable broth in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. Once boiling, turn off the heat and keep on the stove near the risotto pan.

Step 4: For the risotto - heat a wide heavy-bottomed sauté pan over high heat. Add the olive oil and red onion, stir well and sauté for 3 minutes until wilted. Drain the artichoke slices, shake any excess water and add them to the pan. Sauté for 3 to 4 minutes until the artichokes are golden, stirring only occasionally. Add the garlic and white wine and continue sautéing until the wine has reduced to a syrupy sauce, about 2 to 3 minutes. Add the rice, salt and pepper and sauté for 1 minute until the rice becomes translucent at the edges, stirring constantly.

Cook's note: If you are making this recipe ahead of time, take the pan off the heat at this time until ready to continue the risotto. When you are ready to proceed, reheat the risotto at medium heat and proceed as below.

Step 4: Reduce heat to medium to medium-high. Add a scoop of the broth to the rice using a ladle and simmer, stirring constantly until all the liquid has been absorbed. You may have to adjust the heat from time to time so that the risotto is always at a good simmer, but doesn't stick to the pot. Add another ladle of broth and continue stirring, repeating the process until the rice is creamy but still *al dente*. This will take about 20 minutes.

Cook's note: You can use 5 to 6 cups of liquid depending on the rice you use, and whether you like a drier risotto. The more liquid you use, the wetter your risotto will be.

Step 5: Add the butter and parmesan and stir continuously to make the consistency of the risotto softer and creamier. As soon as the butter is melted, turn off the heat and stir in the pesto.

Step 6: Spoon the risotto into pasta bowls. Drizzle with a little olive oil. Garnish with chive tips and serve immediately.