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RECIPES FOR HEALTH

Red Pepper Risotto

By MARTHA ROSE SHULMAN

As this stunning risotto simmers, it takes on a beautiful red hue. If you use saffron, the dish will gain bold flavor and an even richer color.

6 to 7 cups chicken or vegetable stock

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1/2 cup finely chopped onion or shallot

2 plump garlic cloves, minced

2 large red peppers, finely diced

Salt to taste

1 1/2 cups arborio or carnaroli rice

1/2 cup dry white wine

A generous pinch of saffron threads (optional)

Freshly ground pepper to taste

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, or a mixture of parsley and thyme

2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1/2 cup)

1. Bring the stock to a simmer in a saucepan with a ladle nearby. Season generously with salt.

2. Heat the olive oil in a large, wide, heavy skillet or saucepan over medium heat, and add the onions or shallots. Cook gently until they begin to soften, about three minutes. Add the garlic, peppers, and 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Cook, stirring, until the peppers are limp and fragrant, about eight to 10 minutes. Add the rice, and stir over medium heat until the grains are separate and beginning to crackle, about three minutes.

3. Stir in the wine and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly. The wine should bubble, but not too quickly — you want some of the flavor to cook into the rice. When the wine has almost evaporated, stir in a ladleful or two of the simmering stock (about 1/2 cup), enough just to cover the rice. The stock should bubble slowly (adjust heat accordingly). Rub the saffron threads between your fingers, and add to the rice. Cook, stirring often, until the stock is just about absorbed. Add another ladleful or two of the stock and continue to cook in this fashion, not too fast and not too slowly, stirring often and adding more stock when the rice is almost dry. Continue for 25 minutes, until the rice is cooked through but still a little chewy. Taste and adjust seasoning.

4. When the rice is cooked through, add a generous amount of freshly ground pepper, and stir in another half cup

of stock, the Parmesan and the herbs. Remove from the heat. The rice should be creamy; if it isn't, add a little more stock. Stir once, taste and adjust seasonings, and serve.

Yield: Serves four to six

Advance preparation: You can get ahead on the risotto, cooking it halfway through step 3, about 10 to 15 minutes, then spreading the rice out in the pan or on a baking sheet. Reheat and proceed with the recipe shortly before serving.

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