



## Risotto with shrimp, mushrooms and spinach

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*Anna's Gourmet Goodies*



Last year about this time, we found ourselves dining in a quaint little bistro down at the coast, sitting outside and enjoying the warm breeze, seasoned with the smell of salt water on the unofficial last weekend of summer. The menu featured a blend of Italian as well as American fare, but I was drawn to the chef's variety of risotto entrées.

Risotto is a delightfully creamy dish made from rice and a variety of ingredients such as vegetables, meats and seafood. The chef featured a couple of renditions, but the risotto with shrimp and spinach caught my eye. It was excellent, and inspired me to put together my own version of this classic Italian comfort food.

When searching for risotto recipes, you'll likely find literally hundreds of variations. All of them consist of four basic ingredients: Italian rice, soffritto (sautéed vegetables), broth, and flavoring ingredients. Once you've mastered the basic technique of cooking the rice, you should feel free to let your imagination go and put together a risotto that suits your taste. Making risotto takes a bit of work, but you'll feel good all over when you sit down to that first bite. Iniziamo! (Let's begin).

### Risotto with shrimp, spinach and mushrooms

- ½ lb fresh shrimp
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Paprika
- 1 cup Arborio rice
- ¾ cup diced carrots
- ¾ cup diced onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- ¾ cup sliced mushrooms
- ¼ lb. Fresh spinach
- 2 ½ to 3 cups vegetable broth
- Salt
- Fresh ground pepper

Wash the shrimp, peel and de-vein, and pat dry with a paper towel. You can remove the tails or leave them on, your choice; I like to leave them on. Put the shrimp in a bowl, drizzle with olive oil and toss to coat. Season with salt, pepper and ½ to 1 tsp. of paprika. Cover with plastic wrap, and set aside in the refrigerator.

Risotto is best made in a large skillet or pan that is heavy and conducts heat evenly. You'll be adding the liquid a little at a time with the rice spread evenly across the bottom, so you want to avoid using a pan that has any hot spots.

You can find Arborio rice at most supermarkets and certainly at gourmet food stores. The rice is plump and white. Do not wash the rice; this removes some of the starch that is essential for that creamy texture.

Making risotto requires that you keep things moving at a steady pace, so I recommend preparing all your ingredients ahead of time and have them ready to add. When dicing the onions and carrots, I like to cut them rather fine (~1/8" pieces) so they cook rapidly. For mushrooms, I cut them in half first, then slice them about 1/8" thick. Wash the spinach thoroughly to remove any grit, and then remove the leaves from the stems. For the garlic, I use a press, or chop it up as fine as you can.

Cooking risotto is a process of gradually adding liquid to the rice until it is cooked al dente, that is neither too hard nor too soft. It should still have some texture when you bite into it. Adjust the heat so that the liquid is at a constant simmer, just near a boil. Adding liquid slowly takes a little more time and attention, but produces a very creamy risotto, which is what we want!

Place the empty pan on the burner, heat slightly, and then add ¼ cup of extra virgin olive oil. Bring up to medium heat, add the onions and stir. Cook the onions for about 1-2 minutes, until they begin to turn translucent.

Add the carrots, season with salt and pepper to taste, and cook for another 2 minutes. Add the garlic and the rice, stir frequently to fully coat the rice, and cook for 2-3 minutes. Be careful not to burn the rice or it will not absorb the liquid. If it starts to turn brown, you'll want to begin adding liquid right away.

Add the liquid, ¼ cup at a time, stirring frequently, keeping the rice spread evenly across the bottom of the pan, and adding more liquid as the rice absorbs the broth. After adding the first two rounds of broth, add the mushrooms.

Continue this process for about 12-13 minutes. Add the shrimp along with the next ¼ cup of broth, stir and cover the pan for about a minute. Continue the process of adding broth, stirring and the shrimp should turn pink and cook after about 3-4 minutes. Once the shrimp have cooked, add the spinach, stir and cook for an additional minute, fresh spinach cooks quickly in this already heated mixture. Adjust the salt and pepper seasoning, if required.

Cooking times will vary slightly depending on your pan and heat settings. In general, the rice should cook in less than 20 minutes. When finished, you are looking for a mixture that is thick and creamy, not lumpy.

Risotto should be served as soon as it is finished. Although it can be an appetizer, we serve this up as our main dish, enough for the three of us, with nary a kernel of rice to spare. Ah, the pleasures of comfort food.

Bon Appetit!