

Grilled Chicken and Asparagus Risotto

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Serves four as a light, one dish main course.

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 lb of asparagus, washed, trimmed and cut into bite sized pieces
- 1 small yellow onion, diced fairly fine
- 1 cup Arborio rice
- 2-3 tbsp of good olive oil
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 5 cups chicken stock
- 1-2 tbsp butter, or high quality extra virgin olive oil (optional)
- 1/4 cup freshly grated Reggiano parmesan, plus extra for garnishing
- Salt and pepper

The stock needs to be in a separate pot on the stove at a strong simmer (A note on canned stocks, they can be awfully salty and can even impart a metallic taste to your dish. We usually cut it one to one with water). You'll need a ladle to add the stock with and a strong spoon to stir the risotto with. The pot for the risotto needs to be large (5 quart will work well) and as heavy as possible. An enameled Le Creuset pot works very well, as will most heavy stock pots.

Season the chicken with whatever you like. I happen to favor seasoning salt, pepper, granulated garlic and herbs d' provence. Grill over hot coals while you start the risotto. You may step away from the risotto pot to turn the chicken, remove it, whatever. Just don't stay away too long. When it's done, let it rest for a couple of minutes. You then have one of two choices, slice the chicken and add it to the risotto a few minutes before it's done, or you can slice it and arrange it over the risotto before you serve it. Your choice, they both turn out well.

The asparagus you will add about 15 minutes into the cooking process. It should be al dente when the rice is.

Sweat the onions in the olive oil over medium high heat until translucent, about 5-8 minutes. Don't let them brown. Add the rice and continue to stir for a couple of minutes.

At this point, add the wine and stir the rice. As the liquid is absorbed and the rice stops sticking to the side of the pot, add a cup of the stock. Continue stirring, adding liquid as needed. As the rice gets closer to being done, the liquid will not absorb as quickly, so you will need to decrease the amount you put in each time. After 18-20 minutes, taste the rice for doneness. It should be al dente but not crunchy and not mushy. If it's not done, cook it a couple of minutes longer and test it again. If it's mushy, better luck next time.

At the point it reaches al dente, stir in the butter (optional) and parmesan, and adjust the seasoning. You

won't need very much pepper, if any. The rice should be smooth and creamy without being soupy or clumpy. Serve it up and top it with the reserved cheese.

This is a lighter style of risotto that we eat often in the spring, when the local asparagus is in season. For vegetarians, use veggie stock and omit the chicken. For another variation, add 1/2 ounce of morels that have been soaked, halved and cleaned when you add the rice.

Two good wines that go well with this dish are California Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc.

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