

Risotto with Broccoli Stems

Risotto never fails to please as a first course, and if garnishes are added it can be varied ad infinitum. My wife, Gloria, makes risotto with Japanese sushi rice with great success, but for this recipe I use Italian short-grain rice.

Broccoli stems are often discarded by cooks because of their thick, fibrous skin, but a quick peeling makes them deliciously edible. I keep the florets for another recipe and use only the stems here. Depending on the size of the stalks, you'll need 3 or 4 good-sized stems to get enough broccoli for this recipe.

I cook my risotto, covered, to the halfway point (about 8 minutes) in about the same amount of chicken stock as I have rice. Then I finish it uncovered, adding small quantities of liquid until I achieve the right consistency and degree of doneness. This is the same way risotto is often made in restaurants: it is already partially cooked so it can be finished portion by portion in 8 to 10 minutes when the order comes from the dining room.

4 Servings

- 1 cup water
- 3-4 broccoli stems, fibrous outer skin peeled, cut into 1/2-inch dice (about 2 cups)
- 3-4 white mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1/4 cup finely minced scallions
- 1 cup Italian short-grain (risotto) rice
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 1/4 cups chicken stock, homemade (page 37), or turkey stock, or low-salt canned chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for the table

Bring the water to a boil in a large saucepan. Add the diced broccoli stems, bring to a boil, and cook for about 2 minutes, or until they are tender but still crunchy. Drain and set aside. Wash and cut the mushrooms into 1/2-inch-thick slices. Pile up the slices and cut (julienne) them into 1/4-inch sticks. You should have about 1 cup.

Heat the olive oil in a saucepan over high heat and add the onion and scallions. Cook for about 30 seconds. Add the mushroom julienne and the rice. Mix well and stir in the salt and 1 1/4 cups of the stock. Bring to a boil, stir well, cover, reduce the heat to low, and cook for about 8 minutes. Uncover. The liquid should be completely absorbed. If not, continue cooking until it is dry. (The risotto can be prepared to this point up to 2 hours ahead.)

When you're ready to finish the risotto, heat the mixture over medium high heat until it is sizzling, add 1/4 cup of the remaining stock, and stir well. Continue stirring occasionally until this liquid is absorbed and the mixture starts sizzling again, which should take about 2 minutes. Repeat this procedure 3 more times, adding 1/4 cup stock each time. Add the butter, cheese, and broccoli stems at the end of the cooking, stirring them in for 1 to 2 minutes, until the risotto is creamy but the grains of rice are still firm to the bite in the center. Serve right away on very hot plates, passing the Parmesan at the table.