



VISUAL CUISINES

Basil Pesto Risotto with Caprese Salad.

Wilder Rices

Chefs are discovering the beauty of exotic rices.

BY KATIE AYOUB

Remember when Arborio rice was exotic? Well, put it in the ever-crowding diner-recognition box. The one with portobellos, Asiago cheese and pinot noir. To satisfy the diner who wants chefs to take them to unknown lands, and to give you new, delicious recipes, consider Mediterranean rices beyond Arborio and Calasparra, the Spanish rice typically used in paellas. Although these “new” rices come with a steeper price tag, they all are considered the cream of the rice crop, and the unusual fancy-food names should increase their perceived value.

Of the two types of classic short-grain rice grown in Calasparra, Spain, Bomba is considered the superior rice. When cooked, it expands in width rather than length like other rice strains. It differs from Italian Arborio rice, which is bred to be creamy, and Asian rice, which is meant to be sticky. Bomba absorbs three times its volume in broth (rather than the normal two), yet the grains remain distinct. “It’s a great quality rice and I can afford to run it because I only special the paella once a week,” says Jeff Harter, chef at Alison restaurant in Bridgehampton, N.Y.

Carnaroli rice hails from Piedmont, Italy, and American chefs are singing its praises. Of all the rice varieties grown in Italy, Carnaroli is the most difficult to grow and process—its price tag reflects that. Chefs are willing to pay for it because of its high starch content, which yields the creamiest of risottos. It’s also very forgiving, says Gar Aparcio, chef/owner of Vittorio De Roma in Palatine, Ill.

“It’s got a great window between cooking and overcooking. If you continue to cook the rice past doneness, it just gets creamier,” he says.

Jeffrey P. Fournier, executive chef of the Metropolitan Club in Chestnut Hill, Mass., chooses Carnaroli for his risotto because of its creaminess. “The starch level of the Carnaroli rice blends well with the basil pesto that we fold into the risotto, but you still get enough texture from the rice. It’s a great combination of texture, creaminess and herb flavor,” he says.

Another varietal that’s making waves is Vialone Nano. It’s a medium-grain rice grown in Veneto, Italy. It’s shorter and thicker than Arborio, and holds twice its weight in liquid. “I love it for its soft texture and its ability to absorb and enhance the flavors of the other ingredients,” says Salvatore Esposito, chef at Ottimo in New York.

Forbidden black rice hails from China, but is being used more and more in Mediterranean applications. Indeed, this short-grained rice is considered ideal for risotto and is now being grown in Italy—a result of cross-breeding between Italian and Chinese rices. This rice is touted for its delicious nutty taste, soft texture, and rich, deep-purple color.

Anoosh Shariat, executive chef of Park Place on Main in Louisville, Ky., chooses the black rice because of its stunning color and nutty flavor. “But don’t salt the rice at the beginning, because as the water reduces it becomes too salty. It doesn’t absorb water the way other rice does,” he says.

BASIL PESTO RISOTTO WITH CAPRESE SALAD

*Jeffrey P. Fournier, Executive Chef
Metropolitan Club
Chestnut Hill, Mass.
Yield: 4 portions*

1/2 large Spanish onion, small-diced
2 T. olive oil
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 1/2 cups Carnaroli rice

1/2 cup white wine (not a woody Chardonnay)

Hot water, as needed

Basil Pesto (recipe follows)

1 T. Parmesan cheese, to finish

1 T. butter, to finish

1) Sweat onion in olive oil, salt and pepper. Add rice; coat with oil. Do not brown. 2) Deglaze with white wine. Cover with hot water. When rice is al dente and starch has developed, remove from heat. 3)

Fold in pesto, Parmesan cheese and butter. Serve with Caprese salad.

BASIL PESTO

1/4 cup toasted pine nuts

1/4 cup Parmesan cheese

1/4 lb. fresh basil

1/4 or 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and pepper, to taste

Blend all ingredients into paste.

JOHN DORY WITH FORBIDDEN RICE AND ROASTED TOMATO PURÉE

*Anoosh Sbariat, Executive Chef
Park Place on Main
Louisville, Ky.
Yield: 6 portions*

1/2 cup diced onion
1 clove garlic, chopped
1 T. plus 1/2 cup olive oil, divided
2 cups forbidden rice
4 cups water
1 t. salt
1/2 t. plus 3 T. chopped fresh
thyme
1 cup diced eggplant

1/2 cup diced red pepper
1/4 cup diced green onion
Salt and pepper
6 (5- to 6-oz.) John Dory fillets,
skinned (if desired)
Roasted Tomato Purée (recipe
follows)

1) Sauté onion and garlic in 1 T. olive oil. Add rice; cook on medium heat for 1 to 2 minutes. Add water, salt and thyme. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium; simmer until water evaporates. 2) In separate saucepan, sauté eggplant in 1/4 cup olive oil until tender. Add red pepper; sauté until soft. In large bowl, mix ingredients with cooked

forbidden rice. Finish with green onion. 3) Combine 1/4 cup olive oil, 3 T. thyme, salt and pepper to make a rub. Rub John Dory fillets with mixture. Bake or grill fish until done, or until fish turns milky white. 4) Per portion: Place rice pilaf in center of plate. Place 1 John Dory fillet atop pilaf. Drizzle roasted tomato purée on and around entire dish.

ROASTED TOMATO PURÉE

3 medium tomatoes, peeled
1 clove garlic, chopped
1/4 cup diced onion
1 shallot, chopped
2 T. olive oil
2 T. lemon juice

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John Dory with Forbidden Rice and Roasted Tomato Purée.

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2 T. fresh basil, chopped
Salt and pepper, to taste

PAELLA MARINERA

Jeff Harter, Executive Chef
Alison Restaurant
Bridgehampton, N.Y.
Yield: 6 portions

3/4 lb. bass fillets
Coarse sea salt, divided, to taste
1 lb. (20/30-ct.) shrimp, shells on
7 cups water or chicken stock
1 bay leaf
1/2 t. thyme
2 sprigs parsley
1 medium onion, peeled
3 T. olive oil
2 (1.5-lb.) lobsters, split
4 medium squid, cleaned, cut into rings
1 small onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, chopped
1 T. smoked Spanish paprika
1 large tomato, skinned, chopped
3 cups short-grain Bomba rice
1/2 lb. chorizo (optional), thinly sliced
1/2 cup peas
1/2 teaspoon saffron
Kosher salt, to taste
1 clove garlic, crushed
2 roasted red peppers, cut in strips
18 small mussels
2 T. minced parsley for garnish
Lemon wedges for garnish

1) Cut bass into 2-in. cubes; sprinkle with salt. Reserve. 2) Shell shrimp; reserve shells. In large pot, place water or chicken stock, shrimp shells, bay leaf, thyme, parsley, salt and peeled onion. Bring to boil; cover, then simmer 1 hour. Strain; reserve 6 cups of broth. Boil before use. 3) Heat oil in metal paella pan (15-in. base); sauté shrimp and lobster until pink. Remove.

1) On grill, slow-roast tomatoes until skin blisters. 2) Dice tomatoes; remove seeds, if desired. 3) Sauté garlic, onion and shallot in olive oil;

4) Add bass pieces to pan; sauté 1 minute. Remove. 5) In remaining oil, sauté squid rings quickly. Add chopped onion; cook until wilted. Add garlic and paprika; cook 1 minute. Add tomato; cook 1 to 2 minutes until most of liquid evaporates. Stir in rice; coat well with oil. Add chorizo. Pour in boiling reserved fish broth, peas, saffron and salt. Boil, uncovered, stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes or until rice is no longer soupy, but some liquid remains. 6) Add crushed garlic; stir in shrimp, bass and roasted red pepper. Arrange lobster on top; push mussels into rice. Place in a 325°F oven, uncovered, for 15 to 20 minutes, or until liquid is absorbed but rice is not quite done. Remove; cover lightly with foil. Let sit 10 minutes. 7) Sprinkle with parsley; garnish with lemon wedges. Serve with green salad and chilled Spanish white wine.

INSALATA OTTIMO

Salvatore Esposito, Chef
Ottimo
New York
Yield: 4 portions

2 cups Vialone Nano rice
6 oz. tuna, packed in oil
1/2 cup chopped Italian green olives
1 hard-boiled egg, chopped
1 cup pickled vegetables, chopped
1/2 cup Italian steamed ham (similar to boiled ham)
1/2 cup chopped fontina cheese
Olive oil for drizzling
Lemon juice, to taste
Salt, to taste

add diced tomato. Cook on medium heat for 5 minutes. 4) Purée mixture in blender with lemon juice and basil. Season with salt and pepper.

1) Pour rice into sauté pan; add just enough water to cover. Cover pan; bring to simmer. (When water is absorbed, rice is cooked.) 2) Run rice under cold water to stop it from cooking further. Combine rice with other ingredients; mix thoroughly. Refrigerate before service.

MAREMONTI

Gar Aparcio, Chef/Owner
Vittorio De Roma
Palatine, Ill.
Yield: 8 portions

3 oz. dry porcini mushrooms
Water, as needed
20 U-10 shrimp
4 oz. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
1 oz. minced garlic
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 onion, diced
2 lbs. Carnaroli aged organic rice
4 oz. white wine
12 to 16 oz. chicken stock
1 pint strawberries, sliced
3 oz. mascarpone cheese
3 oz. butter
3 oz. grated Asiago cheese

1) Soak mushrooms in boiling water for 10 minutes. Drain thoroughly. 2) Sauté shrimp in saucepan with 2 oz. olive oil for 3 minutes. Add minced garlic, salt and pepper; reserve. 3) In separate saucepan, sauté onion with remaining olive oil for 3 minutes. 4) Add rice; cover saucepan for 2 minutes. Add white wine; cook for 5 more minutes. Slowly add chicken stock. Stir occasionally for 10 minutes, or until done. 5) Add mushrooms, strawberries, mascarpone cheese, butter and shrimp; stir. Garnish with Asiago.