

Roasted Sweet Garlic and Thyme Risotto with Toasted Almonds and Breadcrumbs

Don't be scared by this one, the garlic is not overpowering, it's extremely subtle and delicate combination.

*2 large heads garlic, whole and unpeeled
Approximately 1 quart (1.1 litres) chicken stock
1 tablespoon olive oil
3 shallots or 2 medium onions, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1/2 head celery, finely chopped
14 ounces (400 grams) risotto rice
2 wine glasses dry white vermouth or dry white wine
Sea salt
1 good handful fresh thyme, leaves picked
Freshly ground black pepper
2 1/2 ounces (70 grams) butter
4 ounces (115 grams) freshly grated Parmesan
5 1/2 ounces (155 grams) shelled and peeled almonds, lightly crushed, cracked or chopped
2 handfuls coarse fresh bread crumbs
Olive oil*

For the basic risotto: Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F (230 degrees C). Roast the whole garlic heads on a dish in the oven until soft, about 30 minutes.

Stage 1: Heat the stock. In a separate pan heat the olive oil, add the shallots or onions, garlic, and celery, and fry slowly for about 4 minutes. When the vegetables have softened, add the rice and turn up the heat.

Stage 2: The rice will now begin to fry, so keep stirring it. After a minute it will look slightly translucent. Add the vermouth or wine and keep stirring, it will smell fantastic. Any harsh alcohol flavours will evaporate and leave the rice with a tasty essence.

Stage 3: Once the vermouth or wine has cooked into the rice, add your first ladle of hot stock and a good pinch of salt. Separate the roasted garlic cloves and squeeze out the sweet insides into the risotto. Add the thyme and black pepper to the risotto. Turn down the heat to a highish simmer, so the rice doesn't cook too quickly on the outside. Keep adding ladles of stock.

Stage 4: Remove from the heat and add the butter and Parmesan. Stir gently. Place a lid on the pan and allow to sit for 2 to 3 minutes. This is the most important part of making the risotto, as this is when it becomes outrageously creamy and oozy like it should be. Eat as soon as possible while the risotto retains its perfect texture. In a frying pan toast the almonds and bread crumbs in a little olive oil until crisp and golden. Season with a little salt. Set to one side. Serve the risotto with the toasted almonds and bread crumbs sprinkled over the top. Lovely.

Yield: 6 servings
Prep Time: 20 minutes
Cook Time: 50 minutes
Difficulty: Medium