

RISOTTO FRITTERS IN VODKA SAUCE

INGREDIENTS

for the risotto fritters

1 1/2 cups Arborio rice
1 qt chicken stock
1/2 cup white wine
1 medium shallot, finely chopped
3 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
salt and pepper to taste
1/2 cup prosciutto, finely sliced and chopped
1/2 cup fresh mozzarella, finely chopped
2 eggs
1 cup all purpose flour
1 cup panko bread crumbs
canola oil, enough to cover a heavy bottom pan by 3 inches

for the vodka sauce

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 small onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
2 (32-ounce) cans crushed tomatoes
4 to 6 basil leaves
2 dried bay leaves
salt and pepper to taste
1 cup vodka
1/2 cup heavy cream, at room temperature
1/2 cup grated Parmesan

DIRECTIONS

First, make your risotto as it will need to cool completely (preferably overnight): Heat the stock to a simmer in a medium saucepan, then lower the heat so that the stock just stays hot. In a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan, heat the oil and 1 tablespoon of the butter over medium heat. When the butter has melted, add the chopped shallot or onion. Sauté for 2-3 minutes or until it is slightly translucent. Add the rice to the pot and stir it briskly with a wooden spoon so that the grains are coated with the oil and melted butter. Sauté for another minute or so, until there is a slightly nutty aroma. But don't let the rice turn brown. Add the wine and cook while stirring, until the liquid is fully absorbed. Add a ladle of hot chicken stock to the rice and stir until the liquid is fully absorbed. When the rice appears almost dry, add another ladle of stock and repeat the process. Note: It's important to stir constantly, especially while the hot stock gets absorbed, to prevent scorching, and add the next ladle as soon as the rice is almost dry. Continue adding ladles of hot stock and stirring the rice while the liquid is absorbed. As it cooks, you'll see that the rice will take on a creamy consistency as it begins to release its natural starches. Continue adding stock, a ladle at a time, for 20-30 minutes or until the grains are tender but still firm to the bite, without being crunchy. If you run out of stock and the risotto still isn't done, you can finish the cooking using hot water. Just add the water as you did with the stock, a ladle at a time, stirring while it's absorbed. Stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons butter, the parmesan cheese and the parsley, and season to taste with salt and pepper. Cool completely, preferably overnight, in the refrigerator.

Next, make the vodka sauce: In a large heavy-bottomed saucepan, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic and sauté until soft and translucent, about 2 minutes. Add celery and carrot and season with salt and pepper. Add tomatoes, basil, and bay leaves and reduce the heat to low. Cover the pot and simmer for 1 hour or until thick. Remove bay leaves and taste for seasoning. If sauce tastes too acidic, add unsalted butter, 1 tablespoon at a time, to round out the flavor. Pour the tomato sauce into the bowl

of a food processor or blender. Process until smooth. You may have to do this in batches. Return 1 quart of the sauce to the pot. Simmer the tomato sauce and vodka in a heavy large skillet over low heat until the mixture reduces by 1/4, stirring often, about 20 minutes. Stir the cream into the tomato and vodka sauce. Simmer over low heat until the sauce is heated through. Stir in the Parmesan cheese until melted and well blended.

Finally, make the fritters: In a small bowl, mix together the chopped mozzarella and prosciutto. In another small bowl, beat 2 eggs together with a few drops of water. Place the flour and bread crumbs on two separate plates.

Take a ball made of 2 tablespoons of the cooled risotto set in the palm of your hand and shape into a ball. Make a small well in the center and add 1 teaspoon of the mozzarella mixture. Work the rice so that it encloses the stuffing and forms a smooth ball. Make sure the filling is completely enclosed in the rice. This may take a little practice and you may find it easier to work with the rice if your hands are slightly wet. Dip them in water from time to time. Continue until all of the rice and filling are used up. These can be made ahead of time and refrigerated, but make sure you return them to room temperature at least 30 minutes before breading them. Otherwise, the cheese in the center will not melt properly.

First roll each ball in the flour until completely coated, tapping off any excess. Then, dip them into the beaten egg until coated. Let some of the excess egg drip off before rolling them in the bread crumbs. Let the coated fritters stand on a baking sheet as you coat the others. When all are breaded, reroll them one by one in the bread crumbs. Heat oil in a large, heavy bottom pot over medium heat until a sprinkling of bread crumbs sizzles on contact, about 350F. Add about 1/3 of the fritters to the oil. Fry them, turning them as necessary until they are golden brown on all sides about 8 minutes. The rice should be heated through and the cheese filling should be melted. Repeat with the remaining fritters. Set on paper towels to drain.

To serve, ladle a few spoons of the warm vodka sauce in a shallow soup bowl and place a few fritters in the sauce. Garnish with additional parsley and serve immediately.