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Thoughtful Food

By Susie Iventosch



Spring green risotto Photo Susie Iventosch

This is the perfect time of year for making spring green risotto, because the asparagus is tender and the snap peas are amazing and sweet. And you still have plenty of time to harvest your own crops from the garden.

Last year, we had a crop of snap peas that were just wonderful and that was the first time we'd ever tried growing them. The only difficult thing about working with snap peas is to make sure you don't eat all of them before you start cooking.

They are so crunchy and delicious and make a fresh and healthy snack. Last summer, I could hardly get them from the garden to the kitchen before most of them were devoured. Since our garden has not yet been planted, let alone harvested, we just bought these emerald gems at the produce market last week.

When I wandered into Diablo Foods to buy the ingredients for this risotto, I was so pleased to find Hen-of-the-Woods mushrooms. We once had a special appetizer at a restaurant in Asheville, NC, that focused on these special mushrooms, but I had never cooked with them before. They are incredibly beautiful mushrooms. Diablo Foods also had baby shitakes, and I thought that together these two varieties of mushrooms would be a nice complement to the crunchy greens in this risotto. I simply roasted the mushrooms ahead of time, and tossed the raw asparagus and snap peas into the risotto near the very end of the cooking. This way they stay nice and crunchy, but were warmed through.

Spring Green Risotto

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(Serves 5-6)

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup uncooked Arborio rice
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup water
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and sliced diagonally into very thin 1/8-inch pieces
- 12 ounce package snap peas, ends barely trimmed and cut into 1/4-inch slices
- 1/2 lb. Hen-of-the-Woods mushrooms
- 1/2 lb. baby shitake mushrooms
- 1-2 additional Tbsp. olive oil (for roasting mushrooms)
- 2 cups freshly grated Pecorino-Romano (split)
- Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Once you begin making the risotto, it's game on, so be sure to prepare ahead of time all of these ingredients: snap peas, asparagus, mushrooms, shallots and garlic, heated broth and grated Pecorino Romano cheese.

Snap Peas: Clean and barely trim off the ends. Cut the whole pea pod into several small slices, keeping as many of the peas intact as possible. Some will fall out, and that's okay, but collect them and use them, too.

Asparagus: Clean and trim off top and bottoms, leaving just the stalks. I also peeled off the little sharp points along the sides. Now, slice very thinly on the diagonal.

Mushrooms: Clean mushrooms and trim off the bottoms. For the Hen-of-the-Woods mushrooms, trim off the bottoms and separate the big clumps into smaller, individual pieces. This way you can check for dirt. Then gently rinse them off with water and dry with paper towels. Lightly and gently toss both shitake and Hen-of-the-Woods with 2 Tbsp. olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Roast in 425-degree oven for approximately 15 minutes, or until liquid is dehydrated and mushrooms are just beginning to brown. Remove from oven and save to use in the risotto.

Shallots/Garlic: Finely chop shallots and mince garlic.

Chicken Broth: Heat chicken broth with water and lemon juice over medium heat until simmering. Keep warm while making the risotto.

Risotto: In a large pot, heat olive oil on medium-high and cook shallots and garlic until translucent. Add rice, and cook and stir until rice is glossy. Add wine and cook until liquid is evaporated. Continue adding heated broth, 1/2 cup at a time, stirring frequently, until broth is absorbed. Continue this process until risotto is cooked and creamy, but still slightly al dente. Save any remaining broth for another time, or discard.

Stir mushrooms, snap peas, asparagus and half of the grated cheese into risotto. Stir well and season with salt and pepper. Serve piping hot and pass additional Pecorino-Romano as a garnish.

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