

Piccolo Farrotto

Time: 15 minutes to prep and about 1 ½ hours to cook

If you know risotto, you know farrotto. Farrotto mimics risotto's cooking paths, and borrows its luxuriously simple ingredients almost to the grain. Farrotto manages to capture risotto's profound comfort quotient. But these two dishes from the Veneto are ultimately rather different. For one thing farro manifests none of the demure, maidenly aspects of Arborio rice that demand a civilized interaction between you and your fork; farrotto virtually *bounds* off the fork and into your mouth, a muscular, robust, big wheat-y presence. Whereas risotto graces plates of fish, veal or chicken done in delicate sauces or braised, farrotto complements more ruggedly seasoned fare--grilled chicken, lamb, pork or beef. Farrotto is meaty enough to fill in for a protein and pair with braised greens or scalloped sweet potatoes. The difference between risotto and farrotto is ultimately one of character.

Rice and farro have always had a symbiotic relationship. Both are true landraces--heirloom grains selected by farmers for their cultural and agricultural strengths over many centuries. The cultivation of farro as a protective winter cover crop in the vast rice fields of the Veneto, helped it survive into modernity.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a heavy-bottomed 2-quart saucepan and a heavy-bottomed 3- or 4-quart saucepan, a ladle, and a wooden spoon.

Ingredients

1 cup (7 ounces) Anson Mills Farro Piccolo

1 quart Rich Homemade Chicken Stock

2 ½ tablespoons unsalted butter

1 large shallot, minced (about ¼ cup)

½ cup dry red or dry white wine

½ Turkish bay leaf

⅓ cup finely diced celery

⅓ cup peeled and finely diced carrot

½ cup finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Fine sea salt

Cooking Notes

Because farro is a robust, resilient grain that can take hours to cook, most commercial farro has been pearled—like barley—to reduce its cooking time. This means that once it is de-hulled, part of its bran layer is scalped. When the bran layer goes, the flavor goes, too, and what remains is a chewy grain of almost pure starch. Anson Mills pearls no farro.

Ancestral harvesting practices, however, did prompt us to consider a modern approach to reduce farrotto's stove time. Stay with us here, for a moment: Field workers used to thresh and de-hull farro beside the field, just like rice, to make a midday meal. They threshed the shocks or bundles by treading on them with their feet or flailing them over swept ground. The farro was then quickly hand pounded in a mortar to remove the hulls. The act of threshing and pounding cracked some of the grains and made them cook more quickly. Our version of this practice is considerably less romantic, but far more practical. We pulse the grains in a food processor to crack their bran layer. The farro is still not in any big rush to finish cooking—especially

Freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Directions

1. Turn the farro into a food processor and give it ten 1-second pulses to crack some of the bran that encases the grains. Transfer it to a small bowl.
2. Bring the chicken stock to a simmer in a heavy-bottomed 2-quart saucepan over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pan, and keep the stock just below a simmer as you cook the farro.
3. Melt the butter in a heavy-bottomed 3- or 4-quart saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the minced shallots and cook, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon, until softened and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the farro, increase the heat to medium, and stir until the grains are hot and coated with butter, about 1 minute. Stir in the wine and simmer until reduced to a glaze. Add the bay leaf and 1 cup of hot chicken stock and stir once to make sure the grains are covered with liquid. Cook the farro uncovered at the barest simmer; when the liquid has been almost entirely absorbed and the farro begins to look dry, add about 1/2 cup of hot stock, stir once, and simmer until the liquid is absorbed and the farro once again begins to look dry. Continue to cook the farro in this fashion for 1 hour. Stir in the celery and carrot and continue to cook, adding stock as needed, until the grains have expanded and are tender throughout, without hard, starchy centers, about 20 minutes longer.
4. Stir in the Parmigiano-Reggiano, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. The farrotto should look creamy, not wet or soupy. Taste for seasoning, stir in the parsley, and serve immediately.

Serves 4 to 6

compared with rice—but the finish is comes much sooner than it would without the food processor.