

Lemon Thyme and Garlic Chicken with Pearl Barley Risotto

Rustic simplicity takes centre stage in this beautiful alternative to a traditional risotto. The nutty flavour and chewy texture of the pearl barley are magically paired with tender chicken thigh fillets in a simple sauce of white wine, garlic and lemon thyme. No word of a lie.....simply sensational.

Prep time: 30 minutes Cooking time: 40 minutes \$ Low Budget

Serves 4

2tbs of olive oil

20gm of butter

8 free range chicken thigh fillets

1/2 cup of plain flour

2-3 cloves of garlic, peeled and thinly sliced

10 stalks of lemon thyme, leaves removed and stalks discarded

1 1/2 cups of dry white wine

Juice of half a lemon

Sea salt and ground black pepper

For the Risotto

2 tbs of olive oil

40gm of butter

1 1/2 cups of pearl barley

1 onion, finely diced

1 clove of garlic, finely chopped

2 bay leaves (fresh is best but dry will do)

1 cup of white wine

1.25 litres of salt reduced chicken stock

1 bunch of cavolo nero, hard ends removed and finely sliced*

1/3 cup of freshly grated parmesan

Sea salt and ground black pepper

Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil and blanch the cavolo nero for 1-2 minutes or until a lovely deep green and tender. Drain and set aside.

To prepare the chicken place a thigh fillet between two pieces of baking paper and bash lightly with a rolling pin to flatten them out slightly so they cook more evenly. Lightly coat it in seasoned flour. Repeat with the remaining thighs.

For the risotto, heat a large pot and add the oil and half the butter.

Lightly fry the onion and garlic until softened and add the barley and bay leaves. Stir fry it for a minute or so and then add the white wine, allow it to absorb for a few minutes then pour in half the stock. Pop the lid on and reduce to a simmer and leave it for 20 minutes. Remove the lid and add the rest of the stock, bit by bit (more like the traditional method of cooking risotto) for a further 15 minutes and then have a taste and season. It won't be as soft as rice as it has a chewier texture but it shouldn't be hard either. If you run out of stock and think it is dry just add a little water but it should be almost done at this stage.

While the risotto is largely taking care of itself, heat a frypan to a moderate temp and add the oil and butter for the chicken. When bubbling nicely fry the chicken in batches, on both sides until lovely and golden all over. Remove from the pan and set aside.

In the same pan add the garlic slices and fry for 30 seconds or until aromatic. Add the lemon thyme and lemon juice to deglaze the pan and then pour in the white wine. Season with salt and pepper and pop the chicken back in, juices and all. Pop a lid on and allow to simmer for 15-20 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through. Remove the lid and reduce for a further 5 minutes.

To finish off the risotto, pop the cavolo nero in the risotto and stir well to combine and reheat along with the remaining butter and parmesan cheese.

To serve, divide the risotto between four plates and top with two thigh fillets. Spoon over the sauce and top with a few sprigs of lemon thyme.....

*Cavolo Nero is a leafy vegetable of the cabbage family. It is also known as Black Tuscan Cabbage. It has a beautiful earthy flavour. Substitute silver beet if need be, however it won't need as long to wilt.