

Wild Mushroom Risotto with Speck & Brussels Sprouts

Brussels sprouts. You either love them or hate them. I personally love them and the secret to loving them is in the cooking method. The longer they are cooked the more bitter they become and that is probably why most of us loathed them as children, because our parents cooked the living daylights out of them and they became a soggy, bitter, grey pile on the plate. I am fairly certain that I can convert people to liking these tasty little morsels if they just follow the instructions of this amazingly good recipe. This was a match made in food heaven.....rich, unctuous & earthy risotto topped with sweet brussels and salty speck livened up with a squeeze of lemon and a smattering of fresh parsley. Go on, try it.....I dare you!

Prep time: 20 Minutes
\$ Low Budget

Cooking time: 30-35 Minutes

Serves 4

Olive oil for frying

40gms of butter

2 cloves of garlic, finely diced

1 brown onion, finely diced

2 sticks of celery, finely chopped

8 thyme sprigs, leaves removed and stalks discarded

2 cups of arborio rice

1 cup of dried wild mushrooms or dried porcini

2 cups of boiling water

6 fresh swiss brown mushroom, sliced

1 large flat field mushroom, halved and sliced

1 cup of red wine

500ml of good beef stock

1/4 cup of freshly grated parmesan cheese

12 baby brussels sprouts, halved

200gm of speck, rind removed (leave some fat) and sliced into small batons (lardons)

2 tbs of flat leaf parsley, finely chopped

Juice of 1/2 a lemon

Sea salt and cracked black pepper

Place the dried mushrooms in a jug and pour over the boiling water. Allow the mushrooms to stand for approximately 15 minutes or until soft and plump.

Drain the mushrooms through a sieve and reserve one cup of the liquid.

Check that the mushrooms are free of any grit or forrest remnants and set aside.

Steam or microwave the brussels sprouts for about 4 minutes or until just tender and bright green in colour. Run them under cold water to lock the colour in and set aside.

Heat a large heavy based saucepan and add two tablespoons of olive oil and half of the butter. Once the butter is melted and bubbling add the onion, garlic, thyme and celery and fry until the onion is soft. Add the fresh mushrooms and fry for approximately 5-7 minutes or until the mushrooms are soft and then add the wild mushrooms. Fry for a couple of minutes or until warmed through and then pour in the rice. Stir continuously so that all the rice is covered in the oily mixture before pouring in the red wine. Allow the wine to evaporate, stirring periodically until it is mostly absorbed.

Follow the same method with the porcini water and the beef stock.

I find the best way to tell if a risotto is almost ready is to taste it. You do not want the rice to be too hard in the centre but you also don't want it mushy. It usually takes around 20-25 minutes on a low heat with periodic stirring and topping up of the liquid.

While the risotto is bubbling away heat a medium, heavy based frypan until nice and hot. Add the lardons of speck and fry until the fat renders out and they are lovely and golden. If there is a lot of fat in the pan, drain a little away leaving approximately 2 tablespoons. Add the brussels sprouts and toss them around in the speck until they too are warmed through and starting to caramelize, approximately 4-5 minutes.

Go back to the risotto, it should be ready by now and season well with salt and pepper, stir in the grated parmesan and the remaining butter until the butter has melted and you have a lovely creamy texture.

Finally squeeze the lemon juice over the brussels sprouts and scatter over the chopped parsley. Season with a tiny bit of salt and a good smattering of pepper and stir well to combine.

To plate the dish, place two large spoonfuls of the risotto on each of four serving plates. Make a little well in the centre and divide the brussels sprout mixture over the top of the risotto. Drizzle with a little extra virgin olive oil and serve immediately.