

Spring pea & pancetta risotto

Fresh spring peas are so tempting and delicious that it's difficult not to simply scoff them all straight away as you pod them. When the first of the season arrived at the market in Marina di Ragusa in Sicily where we stayed for the winter of 2012-13, strong winds and rain had been more frequent than spring sunshine, so we created this warming risotto to celebrate these tasty seasonal delicacies. You can, of course, use frozen peas.



Ingredients

75 g pancetta cubes or bacon lardons
150 g peas (approx 750g unpodded)
Olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
1 cup risotto rice
100 ml white wine

500-750 ml hot vegetable or chicken stock
Fresh lemon juice, just a squeeze
Fresh mint
30 g butter
Black pepper to taste

Method

In a large saucepan, fry the pancetta or bacon until lightly browned, using a bit of olive oil if required, then remove from the pan and set aside. Put about ½ the peas and 50 ml of the stock into the pan (without washing it as the pancetta residue will give extra flavour) and cook until the peas are tender enough to mash. Drain the peas, retaining the excess stock, mash them and set aside.

Sauté the onion in a good glug of olive oil until softened, again, in the same pan without washing it. Add the risotto rice and stir to coat the rice with the oil. Turn up the heat, add the wine and stir gently until almost completely absorbed. Reduce the heat again and add the stock (including any reserved from cooking the peas) a ladle-full at a time, stirring until each ladle-full is absorbed. Just before the risotto is fully cooked (al-dente), add the remaining peas and cook for 2-3 minutes. Fold in the mashed peas, pancetta, lemon juice, butter, mint and pepper, then turn off the heat, put the lid on the pan and leave to rest for 5 minutes.

You can add a bit of freshly grated parmesan with the other ingredients just before letting the risotto rest, but we thought it would overpower the flavour of the fresh peas, the real star of this dish.

A recipe from the galley of *Pipit*



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