



The Ultimate **MAKEOVER** **Butternut squash risotto**

Angela Nilsen transforms a potentially high-fat dish into a contemporary superhealthy supper
Photographs DAVID MUNNS

You don't have to be Italian to love risotto, but many of us avoid making it for fear of getting it wrong. It can be high in fat too, using lots of butter and Parmesan. So, if I cut back on the fat, could I still achieve the rich creaminess of this comfort food classic and make it trouble-free?

Seeking advice

Valentina Harris, author of *100 Great Risottos* (£14.99, Cassell), assured me that lightening

this recipe would be as much about the method as the ingredients. 'The creaminess comes from the rice – so as long as you get the cooking right, you can make it creamy without adding all those fats.'

The type of rice is important, too. I use arborio (for its softness) or carnaroli (for its plumpness and dependability). The trick, Valentina told me, is to 'toast' the rice; by frying it before any liquid goes in, its outer shell is loosened and it starts to look

creamy as the first ladleful of stock goes in. Adding the stock slowly and stirring non-stop keeps it creamy.

As to the type of stock, a bought one would be easier, but would it be good enough? Fiona Hunter, Good Food's nutrition expert, warned that bought stocks could be high in salt. 'Use either homemade or one where you can control the amount of sodium.' She also suggested adding herbs to the risotto as a way to boost flavour. Fiona

was all in favour of a squash risotto. 'Squash is an excellent source of beta-carotene which the body converts to vitamin A.'

In the Test Kitchen

I wanted the dish to be vegetarian, so I would either make a vegetable stock or use organic vegetarian bouillon for the stock. My homemade stock was light, fresh, but time-consuming – the bouillon was quick but lacked something. To reduce the fat, I eliminated butter and used a touch of olive oil for frying, but the veg started sticking. So I roasted the squash separately, but that used too much oil.

A fresh approach

I returned to cooking everything in one wide pan. The squash kept its shape and, by using a low heat, the pan needed minimal oil. Also, by cooking the squash and rice together its flavour permeated through. Sage and thyme gave extra flavour and, by constantly stirring as the stock was added, the rice released starch, making it wonderfully creamy. But where was that classic rich taste?

I never usually add cream, but as there was no butter and I had halved the cheese, adding a little light mascarpone at the end gave an amazing richness. Valentina said this wasn't traditional 'but it makes a nice change if you aren't too much of a purist'. I was happy with the organic stock until I read Jamie's Italy by Jamie Oliver (£25, Michael Joseph). He uses bought organic stock when time is short, but he also does what he's seen many Italians do: 'Throw in a couple of dried porcini to give it some real ballsy flavour.' I immediately knew that this was what I had been missing.

The verdict

Not only did my final version look and taste creamy and indulgent, Wendy Doyle, Good Food's nutritionist, gave it the Superhealthy tag. So, if you are looking for a feel-good supper that's no trouble to make, do give this one a try.



Risotto with squash & sage

SERVES 4 • PREP 35 mins • COOK 30 mins

Easy **Good source of vitamin C, counts as 2 of 5-a-day**

- 700g/1lb 9oz piece of butternut squash**
- 2 litres/3½ pints low salt vegetable stock**
- 4 slices dried porcini mushroom**
- 2½ tbsp olive oil**
- 1 onion, finely chopped**
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped**
- 6 sage leaves, finely chopped (plus extra leaves to garnish)**
- 2 thyme sprigs**
- 350g/12oz carnaroli (or arborio) rice**
- 100ml/3½fl oz dry white wine**
- handful flat-leaf parsley, chopped**
- 50g/2oz Parmesan, grated**
- 2 tbsp light mascarpone**

1 Halve the squash lengthways, then scoop out the seeds. Peel, then cut the flesh into about 2.5cm pieces. Pour the stock into a pan, add the porcini, then bring to a gentle simmer.
2 Heat 2 tbsp of the oil in

a heavy, wide pan. Add the onion, garlic, sage, thyme and squash, then gently fry for about 10 mins until the squash is almost tender, stirring occasionally, so it doesn't stick or burn. With the heat on medium, tip the rice into the squash. Keep stirring for 3-4 mins to toast it without colouring. Pour in the wine and stir everything for 1 min.
3 Start to add the hot stock (leaving the porcini behind) – this process should take 18-20 mins, so put a timer on if it helps. Stir in 1½ladles and adjust the heat so it simmers. Keep stirring and scraping down the sides. Once the first lot of stock has been absorbed, add another ladleful, continuing to stir to keep the risotto creamy. Continue adding and stirring in a ladleful of stock as each previous one is absorbed (it's ready for more when you drag the spoon across the bottom of the pan and it leaves a clear line). As the last of the stock goes in (keep a little back) check if the rice is ready – it should be soft with a bit of chew in the middle – and the consistency fluid. Season with pepper.

4 Take the pan off the heat. Add a splash of the stock to keep the risotto moist, scatter over the parsley and half the Parmesan, then spoon on the mascarpone. With the lid on, let the risotto sit for 3-4 mins to rest.

5 Meanwhile, heat the remaining oil in a small frying pan. Add the sage leaves, then fry for a few secs until starting to colour. Transfer to kitchen paper with a slotted spoon to drain. Spoon the risotto into bowls, then scatter over the rest of the Parmesan and the crisp sage leaves.

PER SERVING 517 kcals, protein 15g, carbs 85g, fat 15g, sat fat 5g, fibre 5g, sugar 10g, salt 0.37g

MAKING IT HEALTHIER

A serving of classic risotto contains 725 kcals and 32g fat (16g of which is sat fat) and 3.37g salt.

My version contains 517 kcals and 15g fat (5g of which is sat fat) and 0.37g salt.

Here's how I did it

- Reduced the fat by omitting butter and replacing with a reduced amount of olive oil. Also reduced the cheese and replaced richness with light mascarpone.
- Boosted veg by adding squash.
- Reduced the salt by using low-salt organic stock and boosting flavour with herbs and porcini mushrooms.