

Easy-to-prepare meals and accompanying drinks

# Mushroom, Thyme & Pancetta Risotto

BY RACHEL WALKER



Rachel is a food writer and blogs at [thefoodieat.org](http://thefoodieat.org)

☞ A RISOTTO REQUIRES PATIENCE. It's a relaxed dish that's best cooked with a wooden spoon in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. I've never made one in less than 45 minutes, but then that's part of the joy. When the temperature drops and nights close in, the cosy spot by the oven can become a contested place in the kitchen—and a bit of gentle stirring guarantees prime position.

I've recommended chestnut mushrooms because they're readily available and have a lovely nutty flavour. If your local shop has a broad range, then there's no need to be restrained—oyster, portabello, shiitake and button mushrooms would all make welcome additions.

## Serves 8

- 180g pancetta cubes/bacon lardons
- 1–2tbsps olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 500g chestnut mushrooms, sliced
- 400g rice (arborio or carnaroli)
- 4 sprigs of thyme
- 125ml white wine
- 1.2–4l chicken stock
- 75g Parmesan cheese, grated

- 50g unsalted butter, diced
- Season: salt, pepper

1. Heat a large, heavy-based saucepan and start cooking the pancetta cubes.
2. When the fat begins to render, add the onion and olive oil, and stir with a wooden spoon so the onions are coated and gleaming. Cook on a medium heat for 10 minutes, until



the onions turn translucent (stop before they colour).

3. Next, add the garlic and cook for 1 minute, then add the mushrooms and thyme. As the mushrooms cook, they release moisture and will stop the garlic or onion from burning.
4. After 5 minutes the mushrooms will have shrunk and darkened in colour. Now turn up the heat and add rice to the pan, stirring until the grains become hot and thoroughly coated in the mixture in the pan—but not so long that they start to colour or cook.
5. Add the wine. It should sizzle as it hits the hot pan. Stir until it's all been absorbed. Add 500ml of the stock,

- and let it cook at a rolling simmer, stirring from time to time. Once it's been absorbed, add another 500ml.
6. The final 400ml of stock might not all need to be added. Add it bit by bit, stirring and tasting as you go, until the rice has developed a creamy consistency but the grains of rice still have a bit of a bite to them.
7. Add the Parmesan and butter, and stir vigorously so the risotto takes on a glossy sheen.
8. Taste and season if necessary. Note that pancetta and Parmesan are both salty, as is stock, so don't be too liberal with the salt. A splash of truffle oil makes a luxuriant addition.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM & ZOE HILL

# Red But Not Hot

MUSHROOMS ARE AN EASY ingredient to pair with wine because their savoury “umami” flavour is quick to flatter, with their earthiness going particularly well with a Pinot Noir or Barolo.

Make the most of a red by decanting it. Also, resist the temptation of overheating red wine. When the French term *chambré* was invented, meaning “the room” to describe the ideal drinking temperature of red wine, French dining rooms wouldn’t have been much warmer than 15C. Now the average thermostat in British households is set to 23C.

A young, light and slightly tannic red should be drunk towards the cooler end of the scale (14–15C). Fuller-bodied, more matured reds are at their best round 18C. Either way, make sure you save the mulled wine for heating, and keep the rest

of your red at a medieval rather than modern “room temperature”.

## RACHEL RECOMMENDS...

■ **Barolo, Piedmont, Lidl, £9.99**

It’s very unusual to find a Barolo under £10, making this a great value bottle from Lidl.

■ **Pinot Noir Jacques Dépagneux, The Wine Society, £5.75**

A smooth wine, which elegantly partners a mushroom risotto.

■ **AVB Beaujolais, Morrisons, £4.99**

An award-winning Beaujolais, best drunk slightly chilled.

■ **Steelite craft brown decanter, Perfect Setting, £21**

No need for cut-glass heirlooms—this traditional decanter is more versatile and just as effective.

■ **Wine thermometer, Barrels and Bottles, £20.42**

Take away the guesswork with a wine thermometer.



pudding  
of the  
Month



## Buttermilk Panna Cotta

### Serves 4

- 180ml double cream
- 40g sugar
- 1.5 gelatine sheets
- 180ml buttermilk

1. Submerge the gelatine sheet in cold water.
2. Meanwhile, heat the double cream and sugar in a pan, bringing it up to near-simmering point until the sugar has dissolved.
3. After 5 minutes in cold water, the gelatine should have turned squidgy and slippery. Squeeze out any excess water and stir it in with the still-warm double cream and sugar until it has dissolved.
3. Now add the buttermilk. Stir so everything is combined and divide between four ramekins.
4. Allow at least four hours for it to set in the fridge (ideally more time if you can allow it).
5. Serve in ramekins. ■

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## BOOK



*The Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking* by Marcella Hazan, £20.40. Cult cookbook, crammed with Italian classics.

## BUDGET



**Cooks' Ingredients Carnaroli Risotto Rice**, £1.48, Ocado. This is a bargain for risotto rice.

## BLOW-OUT



**Taste of Italy Monthly Food Box**, from £34.99 per month, Vallebona. Italian treats delivered to your door.