

# *Traditional Rice and Chicken*

Riso alla

serves: 6

This venerable Lombard specialty belies its literal name. Pitocchi (taken from the Greek word for "poor") were beggars who roamed the Padana lowlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seeking sustenance; presumably a plain rice dish was what they got. Though simple to prepare, today's riso alla pitocca is far from meager. Quite the contrary, it is rich in flavor from the pestata base and loaded with succulent chicken chunks.

## *ingredients*

1½ pounds boneless , skinless chicken thighs  
1 cup onion, cut in 1-inch chunks  
1 cup carrot, cut in 1-inch chunks  
1 cup celery , cut in 1-inch chunks  
2 plump garlic cloves, peeled  
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
1 tablespoon kosher salt  
1 fresh bay leaf  
1 cup dry white wine  
5 cups hot chicken or turkey stock, plus more if needed  
2 cups Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano

## **For finishing**

2 tablespoons butter, cut in pieces  
3 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley, chopped  
½ cup Grana Padano, or Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated

## *directions*

Trim any excess fat from the chicken thighs, and cut them into 1-inch chunks.

Using a food processor, mince the onion, carrot, celery, and garlic into a fine-textured pestata. Pour the olive oil in the saucepan, and set over medium-high heat. Stir in the pestata, and season with 1 teaspoon of the salt. Cook for about 5 minutes, stirring frequently, until the pestata has dried and begins to stick to the bottom of the pan.

Toss in the chicken pieces and the bay leaf, and sprinkle over it the remaining 2 teaspoons salt. Tumble and stir the chicken in the pan until browned and caramelized all over, about 4 minutes. Raise the heat, pour in the white wine, and cook, stirring and scraping up the browned bits in the pan, until the wine has almost completely evaporated.

Pour in the hot stock, stirring, then all the rice. Bring to the boil over high heat, cover the pan, and reduce the heat to keep the risotto bubbling gently. Cook for about 14 minutes, or until both the rice and the chicken chunks are fully cooked and the consistency is creamy.

Turn off the heat, drop in the butter pieces, and stir vigorously until thoroughly amalgamated, then stir in the parsley and 1/2 cup of grated cheese. Spoon the risotto into warm pasta bowls and serve immediately, passing additional grated cheese at the table.