

## Asparagus, mint and lemon risotto

This is such a simple, clean and delicious risotto. When buying asparagus, have a look around because there are lots of varieties available now – purple-tipped, white, thin straggly Japanese, wild Spanish and dozens of good English. In this recipe the stalks are finely sliced to an inch below the tips – this will give you lots of flavor from the stalks and you'll then have those whole beautiful tips as a bit of a prize! There are variations on this risotto that I love to do, like sprinkling in a little picked crab or lobstermeat or fresh, peeled shrimp or sliced scallops – all of these work particularly well with asparagus if you fancy a little upgrade. (If you do decide to add any of these seafood suggestions then reduce your Parmesan by half.)

Finely chop your asparagus stalks into tiny discs, keeping the tips whole. Make your basic risotto recipe. Then put a large saucepan on a medium to high heat and pour in half the stock, followed by all your risotto base and the finely sliced asparagus stalks and the tips. Stirring all the time, gently bring to the boil, then turn the heat down and simmer until almost all the stock has been absorbed. Add the rest of the stock a ladleful at a time until the rice and asparagus are cooked. You might not need all your stock. Be careful not to overcook the rice – check it throughout cooking to make sure it's a pleasure to eat. It should hold its shape but be soft, creamy and oozy, and the overall texture should be slightly looser than you think you want it.

Turn off the heat, beat in your butter and Parmesan, mint, almost all the lemon zest and all the juice. Check the seasoning and add salt and pepper if needed. Put a lid on the pan and leave the risotto to rest for a minute. Serve with a drizzle of olive oil, a scattering of lemon zest and a block of Parmesan on the table.

Matt's wine suggestion: Italian white - Pinot Grigio

serves 8

2 bunches of asparagus,  
woody ends removed  
and discarded  
1 x basic risotto recipe  
(see page 120)  
1¼ pints hot vegetable or  
chicken stock  
7 tablespoons butter  
1–2 handfuls of freshly  
grated Parmesan cheese,  
plus a block for grating  
a bunch of fresh mint,  
leaves picked and finely  
chopped  
zest and juice of 2 lemons  
sea salt and freshly ground  
black pepper  
extra virgin olive oil