

Arancini (Fried Sicilian Rice Balls)

For the Ragu

½ pound Italian sausage or ground beef
¼ pound chunk prosciutto
⅓ cup olive oil
1 red onion minced
1 small grated carrot
½ teaspoon dried chili flakes
¼ cup minced parsley
2 teaspoons fresh thyme
1 teaspoon fresh rosemary
3 cloves garlic minced
24.5 ounces of passata or tomato purée
14.5 ounces small-diced tomatoes
2-3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 tablespoons snipped basil
Salt and pepper to taste
1-2 teaspoons sugar, if necessary
1 cup frozen peas

For the Ragu

Skin the sausage (if that's what you're using), and finely chop the meat. Cut the prosciutto into tiny dice.

In a large kettle, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Add the sausage or ground beef, breaking it up with a wooden spoon until it begins to lose its color. Add in the diced prosciutto, and cook until the meat is browned. Remove the meats with a slotted spoon. If the sausage or ground beef is still a bit clumpy, chop it some with a heavy knife, or break it up with your fingers.

In the same kettle, heat the remaining olive oil. Add the red onion, grated carrot, chili flakes, parsley, thyme, and rosemary. Continue cooking and stirring until the onion is very soft, but not browned. Add the minced garlic, and continue to cook for 2 more minutes.

Add the passata or tomato purée, diced tomatoes, and the tomato paste. Stir until well combined. Snip in the fresh basil. Add salt and pepper to taste. Stir in the meats. Simmer for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Only if the sauce seems very sour, add the sugar. When the sauce is very thick and seasoned well, add the peas to the hot sauce, but turn off the heat. Do not cook the peas.

Cool the sauce, and refrigerate it overnight.

For the Risotto

3 tablespoons olive oil
1 minced medium onion
2½ cups arborio or carnaroli rice
½ cup dry white wine
6½ cups chicken stock
1 large pinch saffron
1 cup grated Parmigiano
2 beaten eggs

For the Assembly

1 cup sifted flour
2 cups fine, dry breadcrumbs
3 beaten eggs
⅓ pound mozzarella
Salt and pepper
Vegetable oil for frying

For the Risotto

In a medium pot, heat the chicken stock. When it becomes hot, remove ½ cup of the stock and stir the saffron into it to dissolve. Then bring the remaining stock to the simmer.

In a heavy pot, heat the olive oil, and add the minced onion, cooking until the onion is soft and translucent, but not browned. Stir in the rice, and toast it for 2 minutes until the edges become translucent. Pour in the wine, and stir it until it has evaporated. Begin adding the simmering stock ½ cup at a time. Stir the stock into the rice until it has been absorbed, making certain the rice does not stick to the bottom of the pan. Continue adding stock ½ cup at a time until most of it has been used.

When you are down to about 1 cup of remaining stock, stir in the dissolved saffron. Then use up the the rest of the stock. This process of adding stock should take 20-30 minutes, by which time the rice should be fairly tender. Taste for salt.

Remove the risotto from the heat, and allow it cool to lukewarm. Stir in the grated Parmigiano and the minced parsley, then the beaten eggs, mixing gently but thoroughly. Spread the rice in a large baking pan, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate it overnight.

For the Assembly

Cut the mozzarella into very tiny dice.

Wet your hands, and place a scant ½ cup of the rice in one palm. Slightly flatten out the rice into a disk, and make a small indentation in the middle with your thumb. Add about 2 teaspoons of cold ragu into the little well you've created. Add 3-4 cubes of mozzarella into the ragu. Cover the ragu with more rice—about a tablespoon. Then roll the rice into a ball, enclosing the ragu and mozzarella in the middle. If any of the sauce seeps through, just patch it over with a bit more rice mixture. Refrigerate these balls on plates or a baking sheet for at least 1 hour.

On one plate, sift the flour to prevent clumping. In a shallow bowl, beat the 3 eggs. On another plate, spread the bread crumbs. Season all three items very lightly with salt and pepper. Carefully remove a rice ball with a thin, metal spatula, as it may be stuck to the plate. Roll each rice ball in the flour, then dip it all over into the egg, and finally coat thoroughly with the bread crumbs. You may end up having to reshape the balls. Place the coated balls back on plates or the baking sheet, and refrigerate them for at least 2 hours or even overnight, if you wish

Heat enough oil in a deep fryer, deep Dutch oven, or an electric fry pan. If you are not deep frying, use enough oil so that at least ½ of the ball is submerged. Heat the oil to 375°. If your are deep frying, fry no more than 2 arancini at once. If you're using a frying pan, fry the balls a few at a time (do not overcrowd). When they are nicely browned on

one side, carefully turn them over and fry the other side. This method tends to flatten the balls somewhat. Drain the arancini on paper towels.

In the meantime, reheat the remainder of the ragu, which you may now thin out with some water. Spread some ragu in the bottom of each serving plate, and place the hot arancini on top.

Arancini are best eaten immediately, but they can also be served at room temperature. If necessary, arancini can also be refrigerated and reheated in a 350° oven for about 15-20 minutes, depending on their size.

This recipe makes about 14 arancini.