

Arancini

Hailing from Southern Italy, these stuffed, deep-fried rice balls have been served as street food for centuries. The stuffings vary and can include anything from cheese, cured meats and peas, as below, to meat ragu or eggplant and capers. It's a great use of leftover rice or risotto. Our version gives a light and crispy crust with a melty center and nuggets of salty meat. Italian teenagers will snack on these while casually leaning against their motorini, scoping out the scene. Grab one of these, and you become cool by association. Get your snack on, and do it while they're hot.

For the rice mixture:

3½ cups cooked, loosely packed white rice (preferably short grained), refrigerated overnight (or alternately, leftover risotto)
1 cup low-sodium chicken broth or stock
1/2 cup grated Parmigiano reggiano
1 large egg, lightly beaten
2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley
1/2 teaspoon salt
fresh cracked black pepper

For the filling:

1/4 cup frozen peas, thawed
1/4 cup sliced salame finely diced (1 ounce)
1/4 cup mozzarella di buffala, torn into small pieces (2 ounces)
1/4 cup fontina, finely diced (1 ounces)

For the breading & frying

2 large eggs lightly beaten
1 cup finely ground panko or plain dry breadcrumbs
Enough canola or vegetable oil to reach halfway up the side of pot

For serving:

Marinara sauce (store bought or homemade)

Special equipment:

2-ounce scoop
heavy-bottomed pot
deep-fry thermometer. or wooden spoon (See Cook's Notes)

Add rice and stock to a medium pot over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly until the rice softens, releases starch and the liquid has been absorbed. Remove from heat, place into a medium-sized bowl and let cool before stirring in the Parmigiano, egg, parsley, salt, and a generous amount of fresh cracked black pepper.

In a small bowl, stir together all ingredients for the filling.

To form the arancini, use a 2-ounce ice-cream scoop to portion the rice. Wet your hands and roll each serving into a ball. With the rice in the palm of one hand, use a finger to punch a hole into the center. Fill the hole with a tablespoon of the filling. Pinch to enclose the filling in the rice, rolling to keep a round shape. Put onto a parchment-lined baking sheet or baking dish and repeat with the remaining rice and filling. (See Cook's Notes about holding to fry later.)

To fry, heat enough oil to come halfway up the sides of a medium, heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat to 360 degrees. Add the two beaten eggs to a small bowl and place breadcrumbs in another. One at a time, roll an arancini in the egg, letting excess drip off as you lift it out, then roll it in breadcrumbs, shaking to remove excess. Put back on the sheet tray and repeat with the remaining arancini.

Working in batches to avoid crowding, add the arancini to the oil and fry, turning occasionally, until golden brown on all sides, about 4 minutes. Remove and drain on a sheet tray lined with paper towels or a wire rack. Immediately sprinkle liberally with salt. Serve while still hot, with marinara sauce if desired.

Cook's Notes:

-- When the arancini are formed, but not yet breaded, they can be refrigerated up to 6 hours. When you are ready to fry, roll the arancini between your palms to reshape into a ball before breading, if necessary.

-- Don't have a frying thermometer? Insert the handle of a wooden spoon in the hot oil. If bubbles form around the handle, it's ready.

total time: 45 minutes

active prep: 45 minutes

serves: makes 12 two-inch arancini

difficulty: moderate, or however you classify frying

