

## Asparagus and Pancetta Risotto

When spring asparagus shows up at the markets, we go a bit mad for the emerald green shoots, throwing them in just about anything, including this creamy risotto studded with jewel-like pancetta.

See Cook's Note on how to cut and cook asparagus of different thicknesses for this dish.

### Ingredients

4 cups low-sodium chicken broth

1½ cups water

4 ounce piece pancetta, cut into 1/4-inch cubes

Olive oil, if needed

1 large shallot, minced

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more if needed

2 cups caranoli or arborio rice

1/2 cup white wine

1/2 pound pencil-thin asparagus, trimmed, cut into 3/4- to 1-inch pieces (see Cook's Note on asparagus thicknesses)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 large egg yolk

1/3 cup grated Parmesan, plus more for serving

Freshly ground black pepper

Lemon zest, for serving (optional)

### Directions

Combine the chicken broth and water in a medium saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Put the pancetta in a large, heavy-bottomed, high-sided skillet or Dutch oven and turn the heat to medium-high. Cook, stirring, until the fat renders and the cubes are crisp, about 6 minutes, lowering the heat a bit if they start to burn. Remove with a slotted spoon to paper towels. If the pancetta didn't render much fat, add enough olive oil so there's a total of 2 or 3 tablespoons of fat in the pan. Stir in the shallots and cook until softened, about 30 seconds (the fat is pretty hot). Add the rice and 1/4 teaspoon of the salt and stir to coat and absorb any fat, about 30 seconds. Pour in the wine and let it bubble away, about 1 minute. Ladle in some broth, about one cup at a time, stirring constantly until the liquid is absorbed before adding more. When the rice is mostly cooked through, after about 15 minutes — there will still be firmness in the center of the rice kernel — add the asparagus and stir to incorporate. Continue adding broth in the manner above until the rice is tender yet firm to the bite, about 20 more minutes. The rice will be moist but not runny, and you may not use all the broth. Add the remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt and stir. Turn off the heat. Stir in the butter to

melt. Stir in the cheese, and then the yolk to coat (the residual heat will cook the yolk), then the pancetta. Stir in as much black pepper as you'd like and test for additional salt. Grate a little lemon zest to brighten things up, if desired. Serve immediately, passing more cheese at the table.

### **Cook's Notes**

The thickness of asparagus can vary greatly throughout the year.

#### **Pencil Asparagus**

The first crop to hit the markets is often the pencil-thin asparagus that we call for here. It's so young and tender that it takes only 5 minutes or so in hot broth to cook it to tender perfection. It can be cut into 1-inch long pieces and remain tender.

#### **Medium Asparagus**

Should you find yourself with a thicker version, say the thickness of a finger, or about 1/3-inch in diameter, then slice it thinly on a bias about 1/3-inch thick to get it to cook in the same 5-minute window. You could also cut them a little larger and add them to the rice a few minutes earlier.

#### **Large Asparagus**

This is the toughest variety, and it's often all you can find toward the end of the harvest. While not the best for this dish, it can be peeled (shaved) and incorporated for a similar result, or sliced ever-so-thin with a knife and added at about the 10-minute mark to ensure it is supple and tender by the end.

Some recipes call for adding the asparagus at the beginning of cooking. We find that the asparagus is often left mushy and a drab olive tint, and prefer the brighter bite that these instructions yield.

**total time:** 45 minutes

**active prep:** 45 minutes

**serves:** 4 to 6; about 6 cups

**difficulty:** *easy*