

## Rice Pilaf

### Ingredients:

2 TB unsalted butter

1 TB EVOO or neutral oil (your preference)

1 dried bay leaf

1 tsp chopped fresh thyme or ½ tsp dried thyme

½ tsp Kosher salt

¼ cup finely chopped shallots or ½ cup finely chopped onion

1 Medium-sized clove fresh garlic, grated or minced

A few grinds of white pepper and a few grinds of black pepper (or a small pinch of ground white and a generous pinch of ground black pepper)

½ cup dry orzo pasta

1 ½ cups long grain white rice (best quality that fits in your budget, see notes below)

½ cup dry white vermouth or dry white wine

2 cups broth of choice, preferably homemade or low sodium

¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

¼ cup lightly toasted pine nuts

1 piece of aluminum foil to fit the top of the pot

### Method:

1. Rinse rice in a large bowl until water runs mostly clear. Drain well.
2. Melt butter with oil in heavy bottomed saucepan with a well-fitted lid. As butter melts, add bay leaf and thyme and a pinch of salt.
3. When butter has melted and started to foam, add shallots and garlic. Stir and cook over low heat until turning translucent. Do not brown.
4. Add orzo and stir to coat. Cook over low heat, stirring frequently until pasta begin to toast a bit (golden in color).
5. Add rice and stir to coat, continuing to cook over low heat until it is clear the grains of rice and pasta are separated and well coated.
6. Add dry vermouth and stir so that rice does not stick until vermouth mostly evaporates.
7. Add broth (or water if using), season to taste with salt and pepper (remember to use less salt if you are adding cheese or serving with a pan sauce or gravy later). Bring to a simmer over low heat. Place foil over the top of the pot and place lid on top of foil to create a tight seal. Tuck the corners of the foil down over the sides of the pot, being careful not to burn yourself.
8. Cook over lowest heat for 17 minutes.
9. Remove pot from stove to a cool surface. Let sit 10 minutes before opening the lid.

10. Remove foil, fluff rice as you put it into a buttered or oiled casserole dish. Add fresh parsley and pine nuts and mix well.
11. Rice can be served immediately or allowed to cool and reheated in a low oven.

#### Notes and variations:

Good rice: Yes, I have preferred brands, but my favorite brand is currently under-going re-branding. Let me just say this: the best rice is one that fits your budget, but keep in mind that if you open the bag and notice quite a few grains of rice that are broken or not uniform in color and size, aspire for a better rice as soon as you can afford it.

Feel free to leave out the pasta or substitute a long noodle like spaghetti or linguine, breaking it into small pieces. You know they sell a rice and pasta blend at the grocery store, right? When I grew up, we called it “Rice-a-Roni.”

#### Flavor variations:

- Yellow rice: add turmeric or your favorite curry powder when you bloom the spices in the butter and oil (careful with the heat—don’t scorch the dried spice. Or stir it in just before you add the wine.
- Saffron rice: bloom a few strands of saffron in the wine white sautéing the rice and pasta.
- Tex-Mex: sub out salsa for the wine, using Mexican oregano and maybe a little more garlic and a can of diced green chilies instead of nuts, and diced tomatoes in their juice for some of the liquid.
- Dirty rice: the Cajuns add chopped cooked chicken livers. Go with Cajun style spices.

Other add-ins: my go to is to finish the rice with freshly grated parmesan. I could eat bowls of this by itself. Sigh.

Cultures in the middle east love dried fruits in their rice, calling it “jeweled rice.” Italians will happily stir in an herby pesto, the Latins a good chimichurri. Add peas: green petit pois from the freezer, pigeon peas from a can. Add diced prosciutto, or pancetta (browned with the shallots first). Sautéed mushrooms, of course. Add some diced roast chicken or leftover slow-cooked pork or carnitas, and you have a casserole ready for the main entrée.

#### Things to consider:

- If the package is labeled “young rice,” it may take less liquid. Keep in mind that the longer you wash or soak the rice, the less water you will need in the pot as some liquid is absorbed in this process. Results will vary.
- Plan to perfect your rice over time. There is a reason for considering rice a staple the world over. Billions of pots of rice over thousands of years give proof to its malleability and longevity. Get you some of that.