

1991

91-00.htm: [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

refrigerator leftover vegetable risotto

We have four or five whole books devoted just to risotto, as well as many other Italian cookbooks with risotto sections, more great recipes than you can count. But when you come home and open the fridge, your possibilities are limited. That's why we advocate the impulse-creative flexibility style of cooking—fake it with what you've got on hand.

These leftovers were discovered in the refrigerator one night:

ingredients

leftovers

- 1 onion (well, not really a leftover but a staple)
- 1 stalk celery
- 1 clove garlic (ditto, we try never to run out of this)
- 1 plum tomato
- 1 small yellow squash

additives

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 T butter
- 1 cup arborio rice
- 1/2 c white wine
- 1 vegetable cube
- 1 T parsley
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. Start a teapot of about 4 cups of water boiling and reduce to a simmer when it starts doing just that.
2. Shred the leftover veggies coarsely with a magic hand shredder or food processor.
3. Sauté the chopped onion and celery and pressed garlic in olive oil and butter for a while.
4. Add the chopped tomato, carrot and squash and continue sauté-ing.
5. Stir in the rice and mix it up a bit, then the wine. Evaporate the wine and then start adding boiling water a half cup or so at a time, with the veggie cube or paste with the first shot.
6. Continue for about 20 minutes of this phase. Taste the rice.
7. At the end when you think it is done, add a little more boiling water if it is not sufficiently a touch liquidy, recalling that some water will continue to dissipate through the next step and until serving time.
8. Remove from heat and stir in parsley for color, salt and pepper to taste, and the cheese. Let sit one minute and serve.

notes

1. This was 2 months after the honeymoon. Not that this fact adds anything much to the recipe.

rlorsto.htm: 28-oct-2000 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

giovedì', gnocchi!

[joe-vay-dee, nyoke-key]

Although we may have heard that Wednesday is spaghetti day in America, maybe back in the early days before we understood what a crime spaghetti in a can is (a Madison Avenue ad campaign had to be responsible for planting this popular slogan "*wednesday, spaghetti day*" in the back of our minds), as I was saying, Thursday really is gnocchi day in Italy. Fresh pasta shops or even family restaurants can often be spotted with that little temporary sign in the window "giovedì gnocchi" (no comma or exclamation mark), something about getting ready for the weekend, or maybe its just like fish on Friday. Anyway gnocchi are little potato dumpling blobs that pass for pasta and which easily conceal their potential for yummy good taste. But can nevertheless be found in Italian-American pasta shops and even generic supermarkets (frozen pasta section). And can even be made fresh if they can't.

Once you've got them, the question is: what sauce? Here is where Marcella Hazan made a believer out of us. She'd already convinced us with her lasagna noodle remarks (another story), but this was a pleasant confirmation. For about 6 people, Marcella says:

ingredients (marcella classics -> essentials)

1/4 lb butter (-> 1/3 c)
3 T finely chopped yellow onion
3 T finely chopped carrot
3 T finely chopped celery
2.5 c canned italian tomatoes, with their juice (-> or 2.5 lb fresh ripe tomatoes)
2 t salt, more if necessary (-> left to taste)
1/4 t granulated sugar (-> omitted)
1/2 c heavy cream
(-> freshly grated parmigiano for the table)

instructions (marcella)

1. Put everything except the cream in a saucepan and cook at the "merest simmer" for 1 hour (-> 45 minutes), uncovered. Stir occasionally with a wooden spoon.
2. Purée the stuff and bring to a simmer, stirring again with the same wooden spoon. (-> increase simmer heat and then...) Add the heavy cream and stir-cook for 1 minute more. Taste and correct for salt.
3. Use immediately. (or else!)

notes (but we say...)

1. butter? we used to substitute margarine, but since we were getting soft margarine for a long time, we had to go with the butter anyway since it was conveniently packaged in T unit marked 1/4 lb sticks. we gave up margarine when we decided that it was too plastic.

- looks like marcella cut the butter in half for the new edition.
2. onions don't come in neat T units. we just grated up a smallish medium onion.
 3. same for the carrot. we just took a smallish carrot and grated it in sections in our Moulinex cheese grater. maybe now we would use our food processor.
 4. celery? we forgot. usually when we buy a bunch of celery for a 3 T recipe, they just sit in the fridge until they go soft on us. but nowadays supermarket salad bars solve this problem. if we remember.
 5. canned plum tomatoes? yeah, we usually use them in our sauces. a 28 oz can (the standard big one) is probably right. but lately we've been thinking more about eating fresh. so we have been buying fresh plum tomatoes, the softest ones we can find. (even regular tomatoes work here.) we put them in boiling water for 20 minutes to remove the skins ... just once and never bothered again. and even that time we had some trouble with splitting skins. skins are fiber, no? the food processor is probably the right tool to pulverize them before using. (our [Vitamix juicer](#) really loses the skins anyway, but we never lift it up to use anymore.)
 6. meanwhile we sautéed the onions and carrots but not the forgotten celery in the butter in a big pot. then added the tomato sauce, salt, sugar and simmered for about an hour on low heat. nice to know that only 45 minutes are really necessary.
 7. for the gnocchi (about 1 lb), a big pasta pot of boiling water—a little salt and dumped 'em in. they rise to the top. you have to do the al dente test to figure out if they're done. when they are, drain 'em.
 8. heavy cream? we bought light cream, being more health conscious. worked fine.
 9. added the gnocchi to the sauce pot. and 1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano. it's all right to let it sit around a few minutes but not more.
 10. enjoy.

waiting for gabriella's lasagna

or

getting too familiar with a roller type pasta machine

As [Marcella Hazan](#) rightfully says, the only way to make real lasagna is with homemade (as in do-it-yourself, the "you" being you or somebody you know or are willing to pay well) lasagna noodles. For exactly this reason most of us true Americans (including a certain notorious comic strip cat the cooking team no longer follows) rarely if ever get to experience the real thing, but never having experienced the real thing don't know what we're missing anyway. (Here the "we" means you, because we are lasagna veterans!) Thanks to a late arrival for a Rome commuter train from the Pope's [country-home town](#) (of course He uses a helicopter), dr bob knows.

bob met lele and lele introduced him to rita and bob introduced rita to bill and bill introduced rita to george and the [Vatican Observatory](#) was never the same again but after rita's adoption by the Observatory she was introduced to david in Tucson where the Observatory actually observes ... but that's another story. So rita has a mom named Gabriella, an authentic Italian mom who makes the best lasagna bob has ever had. For years the famous lasagna lesson was talked about, wherein dr bob would be expertly coached by Gabriella in the finer points of excellent lasagna making, but jet-setting schedules and real life considerations conspired to prevent the realization of this historic cooking opportunity.

Meanwhile dr bob merged with ms_ani and various roman friends began asking for wedding gift suggestions. By sheer coincidence (really) he was ready with street addresses and price quotes. From the dr bob scientific work group (thanks, guys!), a Pavoni Europiccolo super espresso/cappuccino machine for making ms_ani excellent coffee every morning to help ease her into the day (not a morning person like dr bob, who was relieved of this duty after a couple years by the realization that high blood pressure called for less caffeine in ms_ani). And from emanuela and domenico came the classic roller-type pasta machine [WITH ELECTRIC MOTOR](#) (making it a super pasta machine), cheap in Italy compared to the US, but requiring electrical connection through the dr bob ugly heavy duty possibly dangerous voltage transformer for cheap Italian pasta machines that don't run on US electricity (previously hauled to America for the estruder-type [Pastamatic pasta machine](#) bought on a visit to the still smoking volcano Mt Vesuvius). For dr bob to finally make excellent lasagna. Not every day of course.

Well, what to do. No lasagna lesson looming on the near horizon. No substitute Italian moms nearby. [Marcella Hazan](#) to the rescue. Marcella Hazan, on an extended visit to the USA on loan from Italy (Giuliano?'s mom), did a pair of classic Italian cookbooks in English, imaginatively titled the "Classic Italian Cookbook" and "More Classic Italian Cooking", that made her a pile of dollars in America, some of which she converted to lira enabling her to live in an outrageous piece of real estate on the Grand Canal in Venice. dr bob had her first volume on the shelf for years but like most of the cooking team library, it was left largely undisturbed on the shelf.

Marcella Hazan? Who's she? that was the before story.

Well, forced to research the team library for some help in invalidating Emanuela's claim that he would never actually use the pasta roller machine, the best bet looked like merging helpful hints supplied by rita with Marcella's Bolognese sauce for the soon to be attempted without Gabriella's strategic lesson classic lasagna. Chosen partly on the basis of the opening remark of this story.

dr bob tackled the noodle job while ms_ani handled the four hour Bolognese sauce ritual, lightened somewhat by the 90's food awareness fears, details to follow. And it was great. Not quite like Gabriella's but an acceptable substitute. But that's not the whole story. An encore performance was arranged with not one but two different lasagnas, one classic and one an asparagus white sauce version. Again raves from the privileged guests. However, a slipup occurred. The instructions of the pasta machine say NEVER let water touch it. Who knows what happened. Maybe bob used really hot water and thought it would evaporate. Maybe bob was just absentminded. Or more likely just plain stupid. The result was RUST. Disabling the machine and requiring serious correctional measures.

You never imagine how complicated one of these roller machines is until you've gotten it disassembled and forget exactly what went where. And with no instructions at all to refer to, not even in the wrong language or by a nonnative speaker of the right one. Armed only with questionable mechanical abilities and a desperate hope for the day when we might again enjoy homemade lasagna. It took a while to get around to the attack. Life is complicated too. Steel wool, tarnish removers, old toothbrushes, and some miracle product WD-40 super lubricant from bob's amateur car mechanic days. It wasn't pretty. The first time was only a partial disassembly. With a manageable reversal. And more lasagna followed. But YUCK! What's this black grease oozing out of the ends of the rollers! Miracle product that had gone where no such product had gone before? And returning? The fun (if this word can be used in the same sentence with roller pasta making) was gone. Between trying to avoid touching the edges and unsuccessfully surgically removing black stains in between passes (hoping guests wouldn't notice the failed attempts), it was clear that more drastic action would have to remedy the latest dumbmeister mistake.

Complete disassembly, hoping to remember how things fit together during the dirty deed. Ooze removed. Almost successful reassembly. After a long and determined battle. Except for the pasta guides. Flimsy little things that just wedge in between the two sides of the machine, catching on some little thingamajig somehow. Impossible to coax into position. Time passes. Another attempt, with a do or die attitude. A monumental struggle. Met with success! Only two casualties, a finger on each hand, some blood left inside as a souvenir. And more residual familiarity with the pasta machine than anyone should know about outside the factory.

[Along the way, a dead hairdryer contributed its electrical cord to the famous voltage transformer after bob accidentally made contact with a screwdriver, the cord, and the wrong place on it and ZAP, the pasta machine stops. Did bob only fry the aging wire to the transformer or the machine as well? Fortunately the hairdryer fix worked and it was back to the fight.]

Still, to this day dr bob always browses the kitchen store roller machine models noting the more affordable prices and the team's increased ability to pay them, since the black stuff at the edge problem has not entirely disappeared. But ... it seems such a waste to junk a perfectly good

machine for a minor little problem like that. Something to remember next time the dr bob team makes a lasagna dinner invitation and you are the recipient.

why lasagna noodles have to be homemade (almost)

Of course you're wondering. What's the big deal? Why do the noodles have to be earned by some masochistic kitchen rite rather than just plopping a box into the old shopping cart? The answer is twelve layers. At least. Homemade noodles can be paper thin to form a heavenly stack of feather-light noodles alternating between just the most delicate combination of red and white sauce layers, unlike any crude imitation version with at most 4 thick noodle slabs separating gobs of overpowering meat and tomato sauce.

However, the increasing popularity of more authentic Italian food products in America may seriously reduce the pain here. Buy pasta sheets in a fresh pasta store. Before they pass them through the cutting rollers to make strip pasta noodles. Right there you cut out most of the work. But they are still not at the thinnest notch on the pasta machine and have to be cut and rolled on the home pasta machine to get that last squeeze to the ideal thickness. Then there is the boiling stage in which one has to fish out these noodles from the big pot of scalding water, about 48 times for 16 layers of 3 noodle width lasagna pan. And find enough towels to lay them all out flat in the kitchen somewhere, layer after layer because of the numbers. More about that later. They still qualify as homemade, though. [Partly in the store home, partly in yours.]

why there has to be an electric motor attached somewhere

The classic Italian mom turns a crank with one hand while trying to use the other single lonely hand for what is clearly the two-handed job of guiding the pasta sheet as it goes through and gets bigger and bigger and more and more unwieldy. All this after clamping the machine down to some clampable surface to keep it from sliding all over the place trying to get away. With an electric motor, it just sits there content without physical restraints and the rollers go much quicker and smoother leaving both hands free to "work the pasta" as they say. The difference between night and day. Hey, that rhymes. Hmm, food poetry ..., naahh!

[The story continues ...](#)

wfglsnga.htm: 22-sep-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]