

Pearl Barley Risotto with Slow-Roasted Tomatoes and Fresh Herbs

Creamy pearl barley risotto featuring caramelized roasted tomatoes and aromatic herbs. A fiber-rich, low-glycemic alternative to traditional rice risotto.

Prep: 15 min

Cook: 50 min

Total: 65 min

Servings: 8

GL 5.8 / GI 21

Ingredients

about 2 pounds total large plum tomatoes, peeled and quartered

extra-virgin olive oil

salt, divided

freshly ground black pepper, divided

low-sodium vegetable stock

water

shallots, finely chopped

optional dry white wine

pearl barley

fresh basil, chopped, plus whole leaves for garnish

fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped

fresh thyme, chopped

Parmesan cheese, grated, plus extra for garnish

Instructions

Step 1

Preheat your oven to 450°F (230°C). Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or use a nonstick pan. Arrange the quartered tomatoes in a single layer on the prepared sheet, drizzle with 1 tablespoon of olive oil, and season with half the salt and pepper. Toss gently to coat evenly, then roast for 25-30 minutes until the tomatoes are caramelized and beginning to char at the edges. Reserve 16 wedges for garnishing the finished dish.

Step 2

While the tomatoes roast, combine the vegetable stock and water in a medium saucepan. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil over high heat, then reduce to low heat and maintain a steady simmer throughout the cooking process. Keeping the liquid warm is essential for proper risotto texture.

Step 3

Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the chopped shallots and sauté for 2-3 minutes, stirring frequently, until they become soft, fragrant, and translucent but not browned.

Step 4

Pour the dry white wine into the pan with the shallots and cook for 2-3 minutes, stirring occasionally, until most of the liquid has evaporated and you can no longer smell the alcohol. The cooking process burns off the alcohol and any residual sugars, leaving only flavor. Add the pearl barley to the pan and toast it for about 1 minute, stirring constantly to coat each grain with the oil and aromatics.

Step 5

Begin adding the warm stock mixture to the barley in half-cup increments, stirring frequently. Wait until each addition is almost completely absorbed before adding the next ladle of liquid.

This gradual process, which takes 45-50 minutes total, allows the barley to release its starches and create a creamy texture while cooking evenly. The barley is done when the grains are tender but still have a pleasant chew.

Step 6

Remove the pan from heat and gently fold in the roasted tomatoes (except the reserved garnish wedges), chopped basil, parsley, thyme, and grated Parmesan cheese. Add the remaining salt and pepper, stirring to combine everything thoroughly. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.

Step 7

Divide the risotto among eight warmed shallow bowls. Top each serving with 2 reserved roasted tomato wedges and a few whole basil leaves. Use a vegetable peeler to shave fresh curls of Parmesan cheese over each portion. Serve immediately while hot and creamy.

Step 8

For best blood sugar management, pair this risotto with grilled chicken, fish, or white beans for added protein. Consider starting your meal with a mixed green salad dressed with vinegar to further moderate glucose response.