

THE SHARED TABLE

Vegetarian and vegan feasts
to cook for your crowd

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MUSHROOM AND GOAT'S CHEESE ARANCINI BALLS

In my former job as a caterer, I would always be put in charge of the arancini balls, sometimes rolling and stuffing several hundred back-to-back. Tedious work to some, but it was my absolute favourite job—drifting off into my thoughts or getting carried away by the kitchen conversations around me, while methodically working my way through mountains of rice. These arancini balls are a perfect starter or addition to a special meal. The simple flavour combination is delicious, and they're brilliant with a creamy pesto dipping sauce, aioli, or a tomato-based chutney. Crumbing the balls in polenta, rather than breadcrumbs, keeps them gluten-free and holds them together when frying. You can also fry these ahead of time and reheat them in the oven.

————— Makes about 20 balls • vegan option, gluten free, leftovers friendly, freezer friendly —————

INGREDIENTS:

225 g (8 oz/1½ cups) polenta
about 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) vegetable
or other frying oil
dipping sauce of choice, to serve

Rice

2 tbsp olive oil
450 g (1 lb/2 cups) arborio rice
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) white wine
1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) stock
60 g (2 oz/⅔ cup) grated parmesan
(or nutritional yeast)

Filling

3 tbsp olive oil
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) mixed mushrooms,
chopped into small pieces, 1 cm
(½ inch) in size or less
5 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 tbsp thyme leaves
1 large handful basil leaves,
finely chopped
juice of ½ lemon
125 g (4½ oz) goat's cheese, crumbled
(or vegan cheese)

METHOD:

To prepare the rice, heat the olive oil in a large, heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. Add the rice and stir to coat in the oil, cooking for 1–2 minutes. Add half the wine and 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) of the stock, stirring well. Allow the liquid to absorb, then add the remaining wine and another 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) stock. Keep adding the stock every couple of minutes until the rice is gluggy and well cooked—the grains should be sticking together. Turn off the heat and season well. Add the parmesan and stir to combine.

Put a lid on the saucepan and allow the rice to steam in the residual heat for about 10 minutes. Transfer the rice to a bowl or container and refrigerate for at least 1–2 hours until cooled completely, or overnight.

Prepare the filling by heating the olive oil in a frying pan over high heat. Once the oil is very hot, add the mushrooms and cook for 5–10 minutes on high heat, only stirring every minute, allowing the mushrooms to become golden. Add the garlic and a sprinkling of salt and pepper and cook for another few minutes. Turn off the heat, add the herbs and lemon juice and mix well to combine. Gently fold in the crumbled cheese.

Place the polenta in a bowl, ready to roll the arancini balls in.

Roll the cooled rice into golf ball-sized balls, or larger if you prefer. Using your thumb, press a cavity into each ball, making it a bowl shape in the palm of your other hand. Spoon about 1 tablespoon of the mushroom mixture into the cavity, then gently reform the ball, sealing the filling inside. Roll each stuffed ball in the polenta to coat.

Heat a medium-sized saucepan and fill with vegetable oil, ensuring the oil is deeper than your arancini balls so you can deep-fry them. Allow the oil to heat over high heat for 5 minutes or so. Test the oil is hot enough by placing one ball in it; it should sizzle. Fry the arancini in batches, keeping the heat on medium and ensuring they have plenty of room in the pan, until the balls are golden and hardened.

Carefully remove the arancini using a slotted spoon and allow to cool on a plate lined with paper towel, to soak up the excess oil.

Serve hot with pesto, aioli or chutney for dipping.

