



Roman Inspired Family Recipe

Stuffed Arancini Rice Balls

These addictive rice balls are called arancini, resembling little oranges

Rice:

2 cups Arborio rice

Sea salt

1 Tablespoon olive oil

6 ounces ground hot Italian sausage

2 Tablespoons minced onions

1 cup fresh spinach, stems removed; coarse chop

2 eggs

1 cup grated aged Pecorino Romano or Parmesan cheese

1-1/2 ounces mozzarella cheese, cut into 1/4 inch dice

Bread Coating:

3 eggs

1 cup dried bread or Panko crumbs,

1/2 cup grated Parmesan or Pecorino Romano cheese

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

1-quart canola oil

Serve with: About 14.5 ounces of Crushed Italian Seasoned Tomato Sauce on the Side

Prepare Rice: Follow directions on package or combine the rice with 1 quart of water in a medium saucepan. Season lightly with salt; bring to a boil; reduce heat; cook over medium low heat until all the water is absorbed, about 15 minutes. Spread hot rice onto a foil covered cookie sheet to cool.

Prepare Filling: Heat olive oil in a medium sauté pan over medium heat. Add ground sausage and cook for 5 minutes. Add onions and continue cooking until sausage is completely browned about 4 minutes. Add spinach; cook until wilted, a minute or two. Remove from the heat; set aside to cool.

Prepare Rice Balls: When the rice is cool, stir in 2 eggs and 1 cup of the grated pecorino cheese. Using your hands or 2-inch scooper, shape the rice into balls about 2 inches in diameter. Use your finger to make a hole in the center and fill it with $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon of ground sausage mixture and 2 or 3 small pieces of mozzarella cheese. Press the rice up and over the filling, forming a rice ball. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or overnight. They also can be frozen for up to 1 month.

Breading Rice Balls:

Beat 3 eggs with a pinch of salt in a shallow bowl. Put breadcrumbs and remaining 1/2 cup grated cheese in another shallow bowl. Put the flour in a third bowl. Dip the rice balls in the flour, then in the beaten eggs, and then in the breadcrumb mixture; shake off any excess. The rice balls can be cooked immediately or refrigerated overnight or frozen for up to 1 month.

Frying Rice Balls:

Heat oil in deep fryer or heavy bottomed pot to 325 degrees F. Add half of the rice balls to the hot oil and fry, turning as needed so they brown evenly until golden brown, about 7 minutes. Remove from the hot oil and drain on

paper towels. Wait for the oil to return to 325 degrees F before repeating with the rest of the rice balls. When cool enough to handle after about 3 minutes, transfer to a serving plate and serve immediately with crushed Italian seasoned tomato sauce on the side.

Yield: about 20

Cook's Note: The original recipe used ground lamb, which had a very mild flavor. I like using hot Italian ground sausage for a brighter flavor note. You could also use pepper jack cheese in place of the mozzarella if you enjoy spicy food.

Recipe Inspired by Cathy Mantuano and Tony Mantuano, "Wine Bar Food"

About the Recipe: These appetizers are coated with a crunchy crust, covering cheese-filled rice. They can be filled with lamb or other meats such as sausage and combined with melting bits of cheese. This appetizer can also be filled with a larger cheese center without the meat, which will turn into a soft meltaway center. An Italian dipping sauce is a delicious side to offer with this appetizer.