

Fennel and Shrimp Risotto

INGREDIENTS

1 large fennel bulb with feathery tops (1 1/4 lbs)
1 carrot, sliced
2 celery stalks with leaves, sliced
1 bay leaf
1/2 tsp fennel seeds
4 cups low sodium vegetable or chicken stock
1/2 lb small shrimp in the shell
salt and freshly ground white pepper to taste
3 Tbsp finely chopped shallots (2 medium shallots)
1 1/2 cups Italian rice for risotto
1 1/2 tsp olive oil
1/2 cup dry white wine
1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice, or to taste

DIRECTIONS

Reserve feathery fennel tops and set aside. Chop stalks and heavy outer layers (reserve inner portion of the bulb) and combine in a large saucepan with carrots, celery, bay leaf, fennel seeds, stock and 3 cups water.

Rinse and peel shrimp, reserving shells. Cut the shrimp in half crosswise; season well with salt and pepper and set aside in the refrigerator. Add the shrimp shells to the pot and bring to a simmer. Simmer, uncovered, for 30 mins. Strain the stock into a clean saucepan. (You should have about 6 cups shrimp stock; add water if necessary.) Taste and season with salt. In a small bowl, blend 2 Tbsp of the stock with sour cream; set aside.

Meanwhile, separate the fennel bulb into layers, then slice lengthwise into matchsticks. Heat butter in a large heavy pot over medium-low heat for 2 minutes. Add wine; stir until liquid evaporates. Add the simmering shrimp stock, 1/2 cup at a time. Stir for minute or two until each addition is mostly absorbed, then add the next increment. When the rice is almost tender, after 16 to 20 mins, stir in the reserved shrimp and a final 1/2 cup stock. Stir until the shrimp are just cooked, about 2 mins. Remove from the heat and stir in the reserved sour-cream mixture. Season with salt, pepper and lemon juice. Add additional stock if desired. Scoop into warmed dishes; sprinkle with chopped fennel tops.

Serves 4 as a main course, 6 as a first course.