

florentine chicken rice

Over the years we have learned that adding spinach to a dish often leads to an exotic name that has something to do with Florence, Italy. Like *Suprêmes de Volaille à la Florentine*, that's French, not our language, or *Fillet of Blowfish Florentine*, that's English of course, both dishes being something with spinach, or *Stufato di anguilla alla fiorentina*, that's Italian for "what, eel stew again?," but surprise — no spinach, and *Baccalà alla fiorentina* — white fish and no spinach or just *La fiorentina* — broiled steak, no spinach!

So what gives ?

(rhetorical question)

Anyway, this is a pretty good recipe. An almost elegant one dish meal for two (or more, for those capable of multiplication). Don't serve it with any white wine that comes in a gallon jug. Start by making sure you've got the following stuff on hand, none of it frozen.



2 teaspoons butter
1 tablespoon finely chopped shallots
1 or 2 pair of boneless chicken breasts
salt and pepper
1/2 cup dry white wine
1/2 cup chicken broth (= 1/2 chicken
bullion cube in boiling water)

2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons flour
1 cup heavy cream
1 egg yolk, beaten and abused
1 cup grated gruyere or parmesan cheese

elegant chicken ?

10 oz fresh spinach
1 cup water
salt and pepper
1/8 teaspoon nutmeg
1 tablespoon butter

1 cup rice
2 1/2 cups water
salt to taste
1 teaspoon butter

As you can see there are four main items here. Chicken, spinach, rice and cream sauce. Five if you don't wanna slight the cheese. We used gruyere. Shallots are like a cross between garlic and onions. We grate 'em. But watch out. They give off tear gas under stress.

Ready?

Saute those shallots in the butter. Then salt and pepper those breasts and slap them into the pan pretty side up, with the wine and broth. Bring to a boil and let simmer covered for 10 or 15 minutes until the meat is cooked through.

Meanwhile, moving right along, boil the water and throw in the spinach, stirring to get them better acquainted. Five minutes should do the job. Then drain in a colander and press all the liquid out. Chop the spinach. Melt the butter in another pan until brown and throw in the spinach and spices. Cook until heated through. We forgot this step and just added the spices later. Stay loose.

Meanwhile, getting back to the chicken, remove the breasts, cover them and leave on stove somewhere to retain warmth. Drain the liquid from the chicken pan and save for later. Add the butter and when melted stir in the flour until smooth, then stir in the chicken liquid. Simmer about 5 more minutes after thickening. Stir in the cream and cook 2 more minutes. Stir in the egg yolk quickly and remove from heat.

Now turn on the broiler. The rice should be done by now. The rice we forgot to tell you to start while the spinach was boiling. (Simmer about 15-20 minutes.) Next time read ahead.

Put the rice in a flat baking dish and cover with half of the grated cheese. We used a 9 inch diameter porcelain quiche dish. Mix them up a little if you want. Then cover evenly with the spinach. Then lay those breasts on top and pour on the cream sauce. Top with the rest of the cheese and slide under the broiler until the cheese bubbles. Then remove and serve. Brown cheese is a clear signal to possible guests that you screwed up the easiest part, so watch it.

This dish can be improved by adding an Italian touch^{*}: arborio rice, making a creamy risotto bed for the chicken and spinach to lie on. (This is like going from a Futon to a heated water bed.) Of course no self respecting Italian would serve a dish with spinach, rice and chicken actually touching each other on the same plate so we cannot pass this off as "*Pollo alla fiorentina*." (The spinach would certainly have to go.) No, France takes the credit for this one. And as usual, we take the blame.

^{*} It is well known that real Italian cuisine is great stuff, and less well known that "Italian cooking in America is lousy." (*Philadelphia Inquirer* 10/1/86) So pretend you're in Bologna, an Italian city known for its cuisine, unrelated to the stuff we stick between skwooshy white bread here in America.