



Fregola Risottata with Clams & Chickpeas

Slightly larger than North African couscous, fregola is a reminder of the Arabic influence in Sardinia. It's made in a similar way to couscous, then slowly oven-dried, giving it a lovely nutty aroma and flavour and an uneven colour because some pieces toast more than others. Fregola is delicious in salads and soups and especially tasty cooked risottata-style, stirred with the cooking liquid in the same way as risotto.

Serves 4



INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil (80ml)
- 1 red onion, finely diced
- 1 stalk celery, finely diced
- Salt flakes, to taste
- 1kg vongole or other clams (2lb 3oz)
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped rosemary leaves
- ½ teaspoon dried chilli flakes, more or less to taste
- 400g canned Italian tomatoes, crushed (14oz)
- 4 cups water (1 litre/2 US pints)
- 350g fregola (12½oz)
- 400g canned chickpeas, rinsed and drained (14oz)
- 2 tablespoons finely sliced flat-leaf parsley
- 2 teaspoons finely sliced oregano leaves

METHOD

1. Place oil, onion, celery and 2 teaspoons of salt flakes in a large saucepan or high-sided frying pan over medium heat.
2. Cover and cook for 15–20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until starting to colour.
3. Add clams, cover, and cook over a high heat for a couple of minutes, shaking the pan occasionally, until they start to open.
4. Use tongs to remove each shell as it opens and place in a large bowl.
5. Cover the pan for another minute or so if necessary to open any remaining shells then, if any still remain closed, pry them open over the sink with a blunt knife; if they smell good, add them to the others, if not, discard them. Set aside.
6. Reduce heat to medium, add garlic, rosemary and chilli and cook for a couple of minutes, until aromatic.
7. Add tomato, bring to the boil then reduce heat to low–medium, and simmer for 3 or 4 minutes, stirring often, until saucy.
8. Stir in water, taste and add more salt if necessary. Bring to the boil.
9. Add fregola, reduce heat to medium–high and stir for about 15 minutes, until it's al dente, adjusting the heat as necessary so that it's just bubbling.
10. Stir in chickpeas, parsley, oregano and clams, remove from heat, cover and set aside for 3–4 minutes, until heated through.
11. Taste and add more salt if necessary and a little boiling water if you'd like a soupier consistency. Serve in shallow bowls.