

ARANCINE CON RAGÙ

A recipe by **FoodNouveau**

I discovered Arancine during one of my first trips to Italy, but I have truly fallen in love with them last month in Sicily. They're the perfect finger food: creamy rice, slowly simmered meat sauce, melting cheese – all of that, fried in a neat little package? I can't think of anything else to serve with cocktails at your next dinner party.

Arancine can simply be made with leftover risotto: just roll cooled risotto into balls, dredge in flour, eggs and breadcrumbs, fry and enjoy! If making Arancine from scratch is your goal, though, stuff it with ragù and mozzarella cheese and they truly become spectacular. You can make a simple and quick meat sauce (recipe follows), but I strongly suggest using leftover Bolognese sauce for a truly heavenly treat. As for the cheese, I used mini-bocconcini, which are handy because they're already portioned and shaped into balls, but you can use cubed mozzarella, or any kind of melting cheese you like.

INGREDIENTS

Makes approximately 18 rice balls

For the rice

5 cups [1.25 L]	reduced-sodium chicken stock
2 tbsp [30 ml]	extra-virgin olive oil
2 cups [500 ml]	short-grain rice, such as Carnaroli or Arborio
4	large eggs
2	cups grated Pecorino-Romano cheese

To stuff the balls

1 cup [250 ml]	leftover Bolognese sauce (or any other thick meat sauce, a recipe follows)
1/3 cup [80 ml]	cooked green peas
About 18	cheese balls/cubes, either bocconcini or mozzarella

To coat and fry the rice balls

2	eggs
1 cup [250 ml]	all-purpose flour
2 cups [500 ml]	fine, dry bread crumbs
1 cup [250 ml]	vegetable oil
½ cup [125 ml]	olive oil

METHOD

Prepare the sauce:

If using leftover sauce, warm it up a little (you don't want it to be too hot) and stir in the cooked peas. If making your own meat sauce, follow the recipe below, then measure out 1 cup [250 ml] of the finished sauce, and mix in the cooked peas. Reserve.

Make the rice:

Bring the stock and 2 tbsp [30 ml] olive oil to a boil in a large saucepan. Stir in the rice, return to the boil, then adjust the heat to simmering. Cook the rice, uncovered, until al dente (tender but firm) about 12 minutes. When the rice is cooked, if



there's a bit of liquid remaining, drain it in a colander (any remaining liquid should be thick, heavy cream-like). Gently stir the rice in the colander to make sure any excess liquid drains out. Spread the rice on a baking tray and cool to room temperature.

When the rice is cool, scrape it into a large mixing bowl and beat in the 4 eggs and grated cheese.

Form the rice balls:

Prepare your workspace: set the bowl of cooked rice, the meat sauce and the cheese cubes in front of you, assembly-line style. Set a baking sheet nearby to put the rice balls on as you're making them. Take out an ice cream scoop if you have one, because it handily measures exactly the right amount of rice you need for each rice ball. Put gloves on if you wish, because it's a bit of a messy business.

How to form the rice balls:

- 1)** Take a handful (about 1/3 cup [80 ml]) of the rice mixture and shape it into a small ball in the palm of your hand.
- 2)** Make a well in the center of the ball and drop in 1 tbsp [15 ml] of the meat sauce.
- 3)** Drop a bocconcini ball or mozzarella cube in the center of the sauce.
- 4, 5 and 6)** Using both hands, gently work the rice so that it completely encloses the meat sauce and cheese, slowly closing your hands over the rice ball to make it perfectly round.

Continue forming arancine with the remaining rice and ragù. Once all the arancine are formed, clean up your workspace. At this point, you may want to freeze the rice balls for 15-20 minutes, which will help them remain perfectly round as they fry. If you don't really care (as I usually don't), you can skip this step altogether and go on with the dredging process.

Dredge the rice balls:

Set three shallow bowls on your workspace. Put the flour in the first bowl, whisk the remaining 2 eggs in the second one, and put the breadcrumbs in the last bowl. Set another clean baking sheet nearby to put the rice balls on as you're dredging them.

Dredge one rice ball in flour to coat all sides. Tap off excess flour. Roll the rice ball in the beaten egg to coat, allowing any excess egg to drip back into the bowl. Finally, roll the rice ball in the bread crumbs, pressing lightly to coat evenly with the crumbs. Remove to the baking sheet and repeat with the remaining rice balls.



To fry the rice balls:

If you'd like to serve the rice balls hot right after making them, heat oven to 200°F [95°C] or to the lowest setting. Line a baking sheet with a double thickness of paper towels.

Pour the vegetable oil and olive oil in a deep and large pot or skillet. Insert a deep-frying thermometer in the oil and heat the oil over medium heat to 375°F [190°C]. (If you are working without a thermometer, test the temperature as directed below.) Once the oil reaches temperature, adjust the heat under the pot to maintain a steady temperature.

If you're not working with a thermometer, test the temperature of the oil by dipping a rice ball in the oil. It should give off a lively but steady sizzle. If nothing happens, the oil isn't hot enough; if the oil around the bread-crumbs coating boils and sputters, the oil is too hot. Adjust the heat accordingly.

When the oil comes to temperature, carefully slip 4 or 5 rice balls into the oil (don't overcrowd the pot). Fry, turning as necessary with tongs or a slotted spoon, until golden brown and crisp on all sides, about 4 minutes. Remove to the paper towel-lined baking sheet, keeping them hot in the oven if you like. Fry the remaining rice balls.

Make ahead: To make the arancine ahead of time, simply let them cool to room temperature on the paper towel-lined baking sheet after frying. Once cool, store in an airtight container in the fridge. To reheat, preheat the oven to 325°F [170°C]. Set the rice balls on a greased baking sheet and warm for 10 minutes in the oven, turning them halfway through. To serve: Arancine can be served hot or at room temperature. They are wonderful as a snack hors d'oeuvres, or they can be served as a main course with more meat sauce on the side.

Simple Ragù (Meat Sauce)

This recipe will make about 3 cups of sauce, about three times as much as you need to make the arancine. Either serve the remaining ragù alongside your rice balls, freeze it for your next batch, or enjoy it over pasta like rigatoni or penne.

¼ cup [60 ml]	extra-virgin olive oil
1 lb [454 g]	ground beef
½ cup [125 ml]	chopped onion
Salt	
¼ cup [60 ml]	grated carrots
¼ cup [60 ml]	finely chopped celery
One 14-oz [414 ml]	can Italian plum tomatoes (preferably San Marzano) with juice, crushed
1 tsp [5 ml]	tomato paste
½ tsp [2.5 ml]	crushed hot red pepper

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Crumble in the meat and add the onion. Cook, stirring often, until the water given off by the meat is evaporated and the meat and onion begin to brown, about 10 minutes.

Season the beef and onion lightly with salt. Stir in the carrots and celery and continue cooking until the vegetables are tender, about 10 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, paste, red pepper and salt to taste. Adjust the heat to simmering and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until the sauce is thickened, about 30 minutes. If the sauce starts sticking to the pan at any time during cooking, stir in a few tablespoons of water. The finished ragù should be dense and reduced. Remove and cool to room temperature. The sauce can be made up to 3 days in advance and kept in an airtight container in the fridge.