

Lesson Plan: Making Risotto with Mackerel Bites and Wild Fennel

Subject: Culinary Arts / Italian Cuisine

Grade Level: High School Culinary Students

Duration: Approximately 2 hours

Objectives

Knowledge: Understand the combination of seafood and herbs in Italian risotto, specifically how fennel enhances mackerel's flavor and texture.

Skills: Practice techniques in risotto-making, balancing flavors, and creating a pesto with wild herbs.

Attitudes: Appreciate traditional Italian cooking methods and the balance of fresh ingredients to enhance natural flavors.

Materials Needed

Ingredients

- **For the Risotto:**
 - 160 g Arborio rice
 - 200 g fresh mackerel fillet, cut into small bites
 - 1 small bunch wild fennel (for pesto)
 - 1 small onion
 - 200 ml dry white wine
 - 500 ml fish broth
 - 25 g butter
 - 30 g grated Parmesan cheese
 - Salt and pepper, to taste
 - Fresh wild fennel (for garnish)
 - 100 ml extra virgin olive oil (for fennel pesto)

Equipment

- Medium saucepan
 - Large frying pan or skillet
 - Whisk
 - Ladle
 - Measuring cups and spoons
 - Mixing bowl
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Lesson Outline



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1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- **Discussion Starter:** Engage students with questions about their familiarity with risotto and seafood dishes.
- **Cultural Context:** Discuss the role of risotto in Italian cuisine and how fresh herbs like fennel complement seafood.
- **Lesson Objectives:** Outline the goals, focusing on risotto technique, flavor balance, and the role of pesto as a garnish.

2. Safety and Sanitation Briefing (5 minutes)

- **Key Points:** Emphasize safe handling of raw fish and maintaining cleanliness during prep.
- **Demonstration:** Show students how to sanitize surfaces and tools after handling raw fish.

3. Ingredient and Technique Overview (10 minutes)

- **Presentation:** Review each ingredient, particularly how wild fennel's aroma complements mackerel's richness.
 - **Culinary Terms:** Define terms like "deglaize," "pesto," and "al dente" to build understanding of each step.
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Cooking Activity

a. Preparing the Fish Broth and Mackerel (15 minutes)

- **Instructions:** If not pre-made, prepare fish broth by simmering fish bones with aromatic vegetables. Sauté the mackerel bites with salt and pepper in olive oil until lightly cooked.
- **Activity:** Students prepare broth and fish, observing techniques for broth development and light sautéing.
- **Discussion:** Explain why fish broth intensifies risotto flavor and how quickly searing mackerel enhances its texture.
AI Tip: AI can monitor cooking times for the broth and mackerel, ensuring both are flavorful but not overcooked.

b. Making the Fennel Pesto (10 minutes)

- **Instructions:** In a blender, combine fresh wild fennel with olive oil, pulsing to form a smooth pesto.
- **Activity:** Students prepare pesto, learning how to balance oil and herbs for a smooth consistency.

- **Discussion:** Discuss the role of pesto in Italian dishes and how it adds aromatic depth to risotto.
AI Tip: AI can suggest adjustments to oil quantity for achieving a smooth and cohesive pesto.

c. Cooking the Risotto (20 minutes)

- **Instructions:** In a large skillet, sauté the finely chopped onion in butter until translucent. Add Arborio rice, toasting for 1-2 minutes before deglazing with white wine. Gradually add the hot fish broth, one ladle at a time, stirring continuously until the rice is al dente.
- **Activity:** Students take turns stirring and adding broth, observing the development of creamy consistency.
- **Discussion:** Explain the importance of constant stirring to release starches for a creamy texture and the role of wine in enhancing flavor.
AI Tip: AI can monitor the rice's absorption rate, suggesting optimal times to add broth for a creamy finish.

d. Finishing the Risotto with Mackerel and Pesto (10 minutes)

- **Instructions:** Once the rice is nearly cooked, add the cooked mackerel bites and fennel pesto, stirring to distribute evenly.
- **Activity:** Students fold in the mackerel and pesto, learning to combine textures and flavors.
- **Discussion:** Emphasize the importance of timing to avoid overcooking delicate fish in the risotto.
AI Tip: AI can help with timing adjustments to ensure the fish is added just before serving, preserving its texture.

Final Steps and Assembly

Remove from heat and stir in the grated Parmesan and remaining butter for a final creamy touch. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Garnish with fresh wild fennel.

Serving Suggestion

Serve immediately in shallow bowls, with a garnish of fresh fennel and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil for aroma.

Assessment

- **Observation:** Monitor students' techniques in stirring, deglazing, and incorporating ingredients at the right time.
- **Questions and Answers:** Ask students to explain why constant stirring is necessary and the role of each ingredient in flavor balance.

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- **Reflection:** Have students write a short summary, focusing on how they balanced flavors and textures.
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Closure (10 minutes)

- **Recap:** Review the key steps in risotto-making and the flavor benefits of fresh herbs.
 - **Student Sharing:** Allow students to share their thoughts on incorporating fish and fennel in risotto.
 - **Encouragement:** Suggest students try other herbs and seafood combinations for variety.
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Extensions

- **Culinary Exploration:** Research other risotto recipes that incorporate herbs and seafood.
 - **Menu Planning Project:** Design a menu that uses risotto as a main course with complementary dishes.
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Resources

Handouts

- Step-by-step recipe with notes on flavor balancing and texture tips.
- Information on Italian risotto techniques and regional variations.

Recommended Reading

- Articles on mastering risotto and using wild herbs in Mediterranean cuisine.
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Notes for the Instructor

- **Preparation:** Prepare fish broth in advance if time is limited, and have pesto ingredients ready.
- **Safety Considerations:** Remind students of proper handling and sanitation when working with fish.
- **Adaptations:** Suggest alternative herbs if wild fennel is unavailable.