

SAFFRON RISOTTO WITH FENNEL AND LEEKS

1 LARGE LEEK
1 LARGE FENNEL BULB
1 1/2 CUPS OF ARBORIO RICE
1/2 CUP OF WHITE WINE
6 CUPS (APPROXIMATELY) OF CHICKEN STOCK
SAFFRON THREADS

TRIM OFF ROOT AND DARK GREEN LEAVES FROM THE LEEK. SLICE LENGTHWISE IN HALF. RINSE UNDER LUKEWARM WATER TO REMOVE ANY GRIT. CHOP CROSSWISE IN 1/4 INCH PIECES.

TRIM FENNEL BULB, REMOVING THE STALKS BUT SAVE THE GREEN FRONDS. SLICE LENGTHWISE, CUT OUT THE TOUGH WEDGE NEAR THE ROOT END. CUT IN 1/4 INCH PIECES.

MELT 2 TBSPS BUTTER AND A SPLASH OF OLIVE OIL IN A LARGE SAUCEPAN. (I USE A PAN WITH CURVED SIDES.)

ADD THE LEEKS AND THE FENNEL. REDUCE HEAT TO LOW. SPRINKLE WITH A GENEROUS PINCH OF SEA SALT. COVER AND COOK FOR A MINUTE OR TWO, MAKING SURE THE LEEKS DO NOT BROWN.

SPOON OFF HALF THE COOKED LEEKS AND FENNEL AND RESERVE.

GRIND 1 TSP OF SAFFRON THREADS IN A MORTAR AND PESTLE WITH A PINCH OF SALT.

BRING CHICKEN STOCK TO A BOIL. REDUCE TO A SIMMER.

ADD THE RICE TO THE SAUCEPAN AND RETURN TO THE STOVE OVER A MEDIUM FLAME. SEASON WITH SALT AND GROUND WHITE PEPPER. COOK FOR A FEW MINUTES, STIRRING, UNTIL THE RICE IS COATED WITH BUTTER AND OIL.

ADD 1/2 CUP OF WHITE WINE. STIRRING CONTINUOUSLY, COOK OFF MOST OF THE WINE.

ADD A CUP OF HOT BROTH TO THE MORTAR TO DISSOLVE THE SAFFRON. POUR IN WITH THE RICE. ADD ANOTHER CUP TO THE MORTAR, THEN TO THE RICE. CONTINUE COOKING ON A LOW FLAME, STIRRING AND ADDING MORE BROTH AS THE LIQUID IS ABSORBED UNTIL THE RICE IS AL DENTE. JUST BEFORE SERVING, STIR IN 2 TBSPS OF BUTTER AND THE RESERVED LEEKS AND FENNEL.