

“Little Orange” Rice Balls

Arancine

MAKES 18

Golden fried rice balls are a classic Sicilian snack. The Italian name—arancine—comes from their resemblance to oranges. Two versions are popular: one with the meat ragu filling that follows and the other with ham and béchamel.

FILLING

- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- 1/2 cup very finely chopped onion**
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped**
- 8 ounces ground beef chuck**
- 1 1/2 cups chopped canned Italian peeled tomatoes**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1/2 cup fresh or frozen peas**

RICE

- 5 cups chicken broth**
- 1/2 teaspoon saffron threads, crumbled**
- 2 cups (1 pound) medium-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- Salt to taste**
- 4 large egg yolks**
- 1/2 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano plus 1/2 cup grated Pecorino Romano**

TO ASSEMBLE

- 5 large egg whites**
- 2 cups plain dry bread crumbs**
- 1 cup all-purpose flour**
- 4 ounces imported provolone, cut into small dice**
- Vegetable oil for frying**

1 To make the filling, put the oil, onion, and garlic in a medium skillet. Turn on the heat to medium and cook until the onion is soft, about 5 minutes.

2 Add the beef to the skillet and cook, stirring to break up the lumps, until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, and salt and pepper to taste. Bring the sauce to a simmer and reduce the heat to low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until thick, about 30 minutes.

3 Add the peas and cook 5 minutes more. Let cool.

4 Bring the broth and the saffron to a boil in a large pot. Stir in the rice, butter, and salt. Cover and reduce the heat to low. Cook about 18 minutes, or until the rice is tender.

5 Remove the rice from the heat. Let cool slightly, then stir in the egg yolks and grated cheese.

6 To assemble, beat the egg whites in a shallow plate until foamy. Spread the bread crumbs on one sheet of wax paper and the flour on another. Place a cake rack over a baking sheet.

7 Dip your hands in cool water to prevent the rice from sticking. Scoop up about 1/3 cup of the rice mixture and place it in the palm of one hand. Poke a shallow hole in the center of the rice. Press a scant tablespoon of the meat sauce into the hole and top it with a piece of provolone. Cup your hand slightly, molding the rice over the filling to enclose it completely. Add a little more rice if necessary to cover the filling completely. Very gently squeeze the rice to compact it and form a ball.

8 Carefully roll the rice ball in the flour, then in the egg whites to coat it completely. Roll the ball in the bread crumbs, being sure not to leave any spots uncovered. Place the rice ball on a rack to dry.

9 Continue making rice balls with the remaining ingredients. Let the rice balls dry on the rack for 30 minutes.

10 Line a tray with paper towels; set the oven at the lowest temperature. Pour about 3 inches of oil into an electric deep fryer or a deep heavy saucepan. Heat the oil until the temperature reaches 375°F on a deep-frying thermometer or when a drop of egg white sizzles when it is added to the oil.

II Carefully place the rice balls a few at a time in the hot oil. Do not crowd the pan. Cook until golden brown and crisp all over, 3 to 4 minutes. With a slotted spoon or strainer, transfer the rice balls to the paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining rice balls. Keep the cooked rice balls in the warm oven while you fry the remainder. Serve hot or warm.