

Diane's Blog
2.10.2010

Romance and Risotto

Let's reset the scene for a modern and romantic Valentine's Day dinner. The tablescape doesn't need to change: I'm all in favor of a candlelit dinner with ribbon-tied linens, fine china, and a touching bouquet of flowers. Whether it's flea market finds or grandma's best passed down to the younger generation, a touch of elegance with a wisp of grace is in order.

What seems passé is the meat-focused plate. Don't get me wrong, I love a good steak or chop. A shared rack of lamb would suit me just fine. But there is nothing inherently romantic in the cooking process. It's February, after all. In most parts of the country it is cold, even blustery, with loads of snow. The diehards might light the grill, but who wants to be touched with ice-cold hands and smooched with a red, runny nose? There is nothing, absolutely nothing, romantic about broiling, and that leaves stove-top searing as the solution to a perfectly cooked steak. A mess to be left 'til morning?

So my thoughts turn to risotto. Why risotto? Because the cooking process is like a slow dance—a rhythmic motion that is at once captivating and engaging. A slight sizzle softens the onions and garlic. The tempo changes as the hard grains hit the pan and the rice is briskly slicked with oil. Wine is added and a flash of steam warms the face and scents the air. It's the beginning of the measured steps. A ladle of broth and a turn of the spoon around the pot. A sip of wine as the broth is absorbed. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. For nearly twenty calm, quiet minutes, the ritual continues until the rice is plump, creamy, and tender. The finale is the addition of rich cream, earthy mushrooms, fragrant herbs, a dash of salt, and grind of pepper. Warm bowls are filled, more wine is poured, and the slow dance moves to the table. It's anticipation and seduction all at once.

Just please bring me a nibble of chocolate for dessert.