

PASTINA RISOTTO WITH SALSA ROSA—If you are the child of Italian parents, as I am, *pastina* (small pasta) was the first pasta you learned to eat as a kid. It's like pasta with training wheels, and it comes in many shapes. Some resemble tiny tubes, grains of rice, melon seeds, or peppercorns, but they are always small and usually served floating in broth.

When I was the chef at Tra Vigne in St. Helena, I created a risotto made with *pastina* as a lighter, hot-weather alternative to the classic rice dish. Customers loved it. I parboil the pasta first, then finish cooking it by the risotto method, adding the liquid a little at a time. It turns creamy like regular risotto, but it's not as heavy. Using *Salsa Rosa* for part of the liquid gives it a gorgeous color and summery flavor.

1 pound *acini di pepe*, *rosmarino*, or other small pasta shape

Olive oil

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons minced garlic

2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano

1 cup Chicken Stock (page 22) or canned low-sodium chicken broth

1 teaspoon sea salt, preferably gray salt

6 cups firmly packed spinach leaves, large stems removed, torn

1½ cups *Salsa Rosa* (page 34)

½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the pasta and cook until half done. It should still have considerable firmness in the center, as it will cook more later. Set aside about 2 cups of the pasta water, then drain the pasta, rinse with cold water, and drain again. Drizzle with the olive oil to keep the pasta from sticking together. You can prepare the pasta to this point up to 8 hours ahead; refrigerate it until you are ready to finish the dish.

Heat the 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large pot over high heat. Add the garlic and sauté until browned. Add the oregano and cook

briefly to release its fragrance, then add the stock or broth and salt. Bring the liquid to a boil, add the partially cooked pasta, and stir to coat. Add 1 cup of the reserved pasta water and simmer until all the liquid has been absorbed, 5 to 6 minutes.

Stir in the spinach and cook until it has wilted, then stir in the *Salsa Rosa*. Thin, if desired, with additional pasta water, then remove from the heat and stir in the Parmesan cheese. Serve at once.

SERVES 6 AS A FIRST COURSE, 8 AS A SIDE DISH