

Reach for the Right Rice

Have you given rice much thought? Whether you're a seasoned cook or a novice, there's always something new to learn about the essential grain called rice.

When it comes to making healthy and nutritious meals, rice is one of the most versatile ingredients that you can have in your pantry. With so many rice varieties available, each with its distinct flavor, texture, and cooking style, selecting the right rice for your meal can be daunting. So, to make things easier, I'll teach you how to choose which rice variety is best for your recipes.

Upon harvesting, rice is cleaned and milled to remove the outer husk. Each rice grain contains three edible parts – the bran, endosperm, and germ. The outermost layer called bran is rich in fiber, B vitamins, and minerals. The middle endosperm layer contains carbohydrates along with protein. The small nutrient-rich germ contains healthy fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Brown or whole-grain rice includes all three parts. Remove the bran and the germ, and you're left with the endosperm, a white kernel of rice.

Rice is most often categorized by size: long, medium, and short grain.

- Long-grain rice has a length that is at least three to five times its width.
- Medium-grain is shorter than long-grain rice, approximately two to three times longer than it is wide.
- Short-grain rice is the widest and almost round.

Short- and medium-grain rices cook up moist and clingy.

Long-grain rice has a firm, dry texture and is separate when cooked.

Rice absorbs moisture and strong aromas, so it's important to store rice in a sealed container in a cool, dry place.

Brown rice will go rancid because of the oil content in the bran. Keep it in a sealed container in the fridge.

Rice can be cooked in a saucepan, rice cooker, pressure cooker, or bamboo steamer. All of these methods give rice what it needs – heat and water.

Washing dry rice removes the extra starch all over the surface of its grains, which can cause an overly sticky, clumpy, or mushy batch. You'll need to do this until the water runs clear. Now the rice is ready to cook.

As a rule of thumb, 1 cup of uncooked rice produces about 3 cups of cooked rice. Check the packaging on the rice, as water requirements and cook times vary according to grain type, when the rice was harvested, and whether or not it's been parboiled.

If you like firmer, drier rice, reduce the water by a few tablespoons and shorten the cooking time by a few minutes. If you want wetter, softer rice, increase the water by a few tablespoons.

Resting the rice is crucial. As the rice rests, covered, off the heat, its starches cool down slightly, which means the grains firm up. If you stir the grains as soon as they're cooked, while they're still very hot and wet, they can break up and get mushy. After 10 to 15 minutes, you can use a flexible rubber spatula to fluff the hot rice, stirring it gently, creating some volume. The rice is ready. Keep it covered until you're ready to eat.

Use cooked rice within two hours or refrigerate it. Transfer the cooled rice to an airtight container and refrigerate for up to 4 days. Reheat in a microwave-safe bowl with a splash of water in 30-second increments until hot.

Freeze cooked rice for longer storage. Freeze for up to 3 months. Thaw frozen rice directly in hot dishes or microwave.

Rice is a nutritious and versatile food that can be utilized in many different recipes. It offers a unique range of textures, flavors, and cooking methods that can enhance the taste of your meals.

(Sources: www.tastingtable.com; www.usarice.com)