

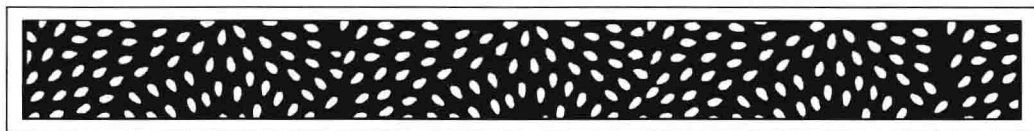
WILD ABOUT



RICE

MARIE BIANCO





WILD ABOUT RICE

BY MARIE BIANCO

BARRON'S

New York • London • Toronto • Sydney

This book is for Frank who has always been there for me. Thanks for coming to my aid during computer glitches and especially when asked to try yet another dish.

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INTRODUCTION

Because I am a food writer, people are always asking me what foods are “hot.” When I tell them to look for onion marmalade or fig confit, smoked venison or marinated goat cheese as new and exciting foods, I get that “Wow, isn’t that something” expression and they’re very happy. But if I tell them that rice will be the new and exciting food of the nineties, the result is an “I think she’s been working too hard” stare.

People who care about their bodies are eating complex carbohydrates these days, so foods like pasta get high marks for being nutritionally sound. And I think the time may be right for another “pasta.” Rice is that “new and different” complex carbohydrate that happens to be one of the world’s oldest foods and the staple of half its population, eaten by every culture except perhaps, the Eskimos.

So this book is for those people who think that rice is used only in chicken soup, with Chinese takeout, and as rice pudding, as well as those who are passionate about paella, jambalaya, and risotto.

NOTE: In recipes where cooked rice is called for, long grain white, converted or brown rice may be used.

THE STORY OF RICE

The story of rice is as old as civilization itself. Some archeologists claim that rice has been consumed for over 5,000 years. Even today almost half the world's population uses rice as its number-one food. Annual per capita consumption worldwide is 143 pounds, but in southeast Asia it is as high as 300 pounds.

In this country the yearly rice consumption is less than 13 pounds per person. Consequently, although the United States grows only 2 percent of the world crop, it is one of the largest rice exporters. And this happened by accident about 300 years ago.

When a storm-battered ship took refuge in Charleston, South Carolina, harbor for repairs, the ship's captain gave a small amount of "Golde Seede Rice" (named for its color) to a local planter. The seed took root and flourished in the tidal marshlands of the Carolinas and Georgia. By 1700, colonists were producing more "Carolina Golde Rice" than there were ships to carry it to England. But rice cultivation is labor-intensive, and after the War Between the States the Carolina rice industry never recovered.

An enterprising farmer discovered that rice could be produced on the broad prairie of southwestern Louisiana and southeastern Texas, using the same methods employed for growing wheat. Ensuing mechanization revolutionized the rice industry in this country.

Around the turn of the century, rice-growing was attempted in Arkansas. It was so successful that people were attracted by the lure of cheap land and a bountiful harvest contributed to making Arkansas the country's leading rice-growing region. About 10 years later cultivation moved to California, and by 1920 it became a major rice-producing state.

Today, rice farms have sprung up in Mississippi and southern Missouri. The plant ranks sixth in production value of major field crops in the U.S., and about 66 percent of the crop is exported to more than 100 countries. Of the rice exported, two-thirds is long-grain, close to one-third is medium-grain, and the remainder is short-grain. The world's chief rice producers are China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam.

KINDS OF RICE

It's hard to believe that there are 40,000 different varieties of rice grown in the world today. Long-, medium- and short-grain types are the most popular in this country, but limited amounts of the waxy and aromatic varieties are also produced. All kinds of long, medium and short rice come in both white and brown varieties. Each of these rices is slightly different in appearance, and there are subtle taste differences as well. Nutritionally, however, all except waxy rice are about the same and can often be interchanged in recipes.

Long-grain rice is four to five times as long as it is wide; when the grains are cooked, they are separate and fluffy. An all-purpose rice, it is the most popular type in the United States today.

Medium rice is short and plump. Once cooked, the grains are moist and tender and have a tendency to cling together. It's good for risotto, molds and dessert, or when you want the rice to stick to itself.

Short-grain rice is rich in amylopectin, a starch that tenderizes the grains and at the same time makes them cling together. This type of rice is mostly sold in Oriental and Hispanic markets and is a favorite for sushi.

Waxy rice, also called sweet or glutinous rice, is short, plump and chalky white. Once it has been cooked, it loses its shape and becomes very sticky. Its starch and flour are used as a binder for frozen gravies and sauces because they do not break down after freezing and thawing.

Aromatic rices are long-grain types that give off an aroma of nuts or popcorn as they cook. A "wild pecan rice" and a "popcorn rice," both grown in Louisiana in limited quantities, are available mostly through mail order.

Another type of rice becoming more and more popular today is basmati, a curved, long-grain aromatic variety grown in India. A favorite with curries, basmati rice is frequently aged for a year to improve its flavor. A form of basmati rice called Texmati is successfully grown in Texas, and Wehani, a hybrid of basmati and brown rice with a nutty flavor and aroma, is cultivated in California.

Short, fat grains of arborio rice, from the Piedmont and Lombardy areas of Italy, are used chiefly for making risotto. Arborio rice is often sold in 1-pound cloth bags.

Although it is called rice, wild rice is not a true rice, but an aquatic grass grown in Minnesota, Canada and, most recently, California. It

is chewy, dark brown and nutty in flavor. Though once very expensive, it has become much more affordable in the last few years thanks to expanded cultivation and the development of more efficient harvesting methods.

MILLING RICE

Milling, or processing rice from field to shelf, produces different products. Depending on the kind you choose, rice can take 45 minutes of simmering or be reconstituted in 5 minutes.

All rice starts out in the field as the same grain. White rice results after the grain's outer husk and bran layers are removed. It is often enriched with the nutrients that are thereby removed—iron, niacin and thiamine. One cup of raw white rice yields 3 cups after 15 to 18 minutes' cooking.

When just the outer husk is removed, the grain is called brown rice; the remaining layers of bran give it a nutty taste and a slight crunch. The bran also gives the rice its tan color, additional protein and nutrients. However, the barrier it forms makes more liquid and a longer cooking time necessary. Owing to the oil content of the bran, brown rice can become rancid if kept on the shelf too long, so uncooked brown rice should be stored in the refrigerator. One cup of brown rice yields 3 to 4 cups cooked.

Parboiled or "converted" rice is soaked, steamed, dried and then milled to remove the outer hull, causing a harder, more compact, shiny grain. The result is more nutritious but parboiled rice requires more liquid and a longer cooking time than plain rice. One cup of parboiled

rice makes 3 to 4 cups cooked.

Precooked rice is enriched rice that has been milled, completely cooked and then dried. Upon the addition of boiling water, the grains rehydrate in just a few minutes. The most widely recognizable brand is Minute Rice.

RICE NUTRITION

It's hard to say anything bad about rice. It contains zero cholesterol, is low in fat and sodium, gluten-free and nonallergenic. Rice is a complex carbohydrate and is easy to digest. And it is almost always baby's first cereal.

Rice lacks one amino acid to make it a complete-protein food, but when served with beans, nuts or seeds it provides high-quality protein.

Although brown rice owes much of its nutritive content to its bran covering, white rice is enriched with the nutrients it loses during the milling process, so brown and white rice are almost even on the nutrition scoreboard. A ½ cup serving of white rice provides 82 calories; brown rice has 92 calories per serving.

TO RINSE OR NOT TO RINSE

Years ago, when rice was sold in open barrels or burlap bags, many shoppers rinsed rice as a way of cleaning it after it had been handled by shoppers or contaminated by insects. Even today, Asian cooks wash rice to an extreme. The Chinese may rinse rice in a strainer until the water runs clear, perhaps 10 minutes or longer. Japanese sometimes soak rice for several hours before cooking.

Today's rice comes in a sealed box or bag and does not require rinsing; in fact, rinsing enriched rice will wash away nutrients, many of which are water soluble. On the other hand, if you are buying imported rice and its former environment is uncertain, it is a good idea to give it a quick rinse under cold water just before cooking.

HOW TO COOK RICE

Every country has its own surefire way of cooking rice, and it all has to do with the ratio of rice to water.

The Chinese like to simmer it in twice the volume of water to rice, tightly covered. The Japanese boil it covered for 10 minutes, simmer it for 10 minutes and leave it off the heat for 10 minutes. In Singapore you are apt to find rice boiled in three to four times its volume of boiling water for 12 minutes, drained and dried out in the oven. Indians generally cook rice for 20 minutes before rinsing it in cold water. Italians cook rice like pasta, in large amounts of rapidly boiling water until it is al dente.

Here are five tips to remember when cooking rice:

Measure water and rice accurately.

Time the cooking.

The rice will triple or quadruple in volume, so use a large enough pot with a tight-fitting lid.

Do not remove the lid until the end of the cooking time.

If rice is not sufficiently done, return cover and cook a few minutes longer.

When rice is cooked, stir with a fork to allow steam to escape and to

keep grains separate.

Here are some ways to cook rice on top of the stove. Adding ½ teaspoon salt and a tablespoon of butter or margarine to the pot are optional. Instead of water, you can add a lot of flavor to rice by cooking it in beef or chicken stock, the water left over from cooking vegetables, diluted tomato juice, unsweetened coconut milk or even clam broth, depending on what the rice is going to be served with.

The following times are estimates of how long rice should cook. The shape of the pot, how tightly the lid fits, how old the rice is, even altitude will affect the cooking time. If you always make your rice in the same pot, you will soon have it down to a science.

1 CUP UNCOOKED RICE	LIQUID	COOKING TIME	YIELD
Regular milled long-grain	1¾–2 cups	15–18 minutes	3 cups
Regular milled medium- or short-grain	1½ cups	15 minutes	3 cups
Brown	2–2½ cups	35–45 minutes	3 to 4 cups
Parboiled	2–2½ cups	20–22 minutes	3 to 4 cups

To cook rice in a conventional oven, combine rice with boiling liquid in the proportions given above, cover tightly and bake at 350°F (180°C) for 15 to 20 minutes longer than times given above. Fluff with fork.

To cook rice in the microwave oven, combine ingredients in above

proportions, cover and cook on high power for 5 minutes or until boiling. Reduce power to 50 percent and cook for times listed above. Fluff with fork.

Automatic and non-automatic electric rice cookers are becoming more popular; they should be used following the manufacturer's instructions. They usually require less liquid than top-of-the-stove cooking.

To reheat rice, add 2 tablespoons liquid for each cup of rice. Cover and heat for about 5 minutes on top of the range, or for 1 minute in the microwave on high power.

As a side dish, plain rice can be enhanced by adding chopped scallions or parsley, stir-fried mushrooms, butter-browned almonds, some chopped fresh mint, sour cream and chives, fried onions, a dose of shredded cheddar cheese or a few raisins and toasted pine nuts.

Leftover rice can be added to meat loaf, soup, pancakes or salad, or scrambled with eggs.

STORAGE

Any form of white rice will keep indefinitely in a tightly closed container on the pantry shelf. Brown rice has a shelf life of six months, or much longer in the refrigerator.

Cooked rice will keep, tightly sealed, in the refrigerator for about a week, or frozen for up to six months.

OTHER USES FOR RICE

***Rice flour** is used in commercial food processing, baking and cereals, and as a filler in meat products. When used in frozen foods, flour*

ground from waxy rice will stand up to the rigors of freezing and thawing without causing defrosted gravies to separate as is sometimes the case with cornstarch. Because rice flour contains no gluten, those who are allergic to wheat can safely eat baked products made with it. Rice flour is sold at health food and specialty stores.

Rice noodles are popular in parts of Asia where no wheat is grown. They range from translucent rice sticks, which look like fishing line and expand the moment they are lowered into hot fat, to fat, chewy Chinese chow fun noodles.

Rice bran consists of the outer layers and germ directly beneath the seed's hull. With a nutty taste and crunchy texture, the bran is rich in protein and B-vitamins. Recent studies by the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicate that rice bran may be more effective than oat bran in lowering blood cholesterol.

Sold in health food stores, rice bran can be sprinkled over hot or cold cereal, added to tunafish or egg salad or used as a crisp topping for ice cream. Substitute it for part of the bread in a meatloaf, or stir a few tablespoons into pancake or waffle batter and muffin or bread doughs.

NOTE: When a recipe calls for cooked rice, the cook can use plain or converted rice, or even brown rice.

Rice cereals abound on supermarket shelves in a variety of shapes and tastes; puffed rice, Rice Krispies and Rice Chex are but a few. **Rice cakes**, made from compressed puffed rice, have also become popular.

Rice oil, extracted from rice bran, has a high smoking point, which makes it useful for deep-fat frying. It can also be used in salad dressings and mayonnaise. Since it is a plant product, the oil contains no

cholesterol. It is sold in Oriental and health food stores.

***Rice vinegar** is an Asian staple. It is a mild, clear vinegar used in making sushi rice as well as in salad dressings.*

***Beer brewing** takes advantage of rice grains that have been broken during the milling process.*

***Rice wine** is found in both China and Japan. Japanese saké is slightly sweet and most often served warm. (It is deceiving because it doesn't have an alcoholic taste but it can pack quite a wallop.) Mirin is a Japanese rice wine used only for cooking. Chinese rice wine, or shaoxing, is golden brown in color and has a rich, sweet mellow flavor.*

CONVERSION TABLES

The weights and measure in the lists of ingredients and cooking instructions for each recipe are in both U.S. and metric units.

LIQUID MEASURES

The Imperial cup is considerably larger than the U. S. cup. Use the following table to convert to Imperial liquid units.

AMERICAN CUP (in book)

IMPERIAL CUP (adjusts to)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	4 tablespoons
$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	5 tablespoons
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	8 tablespoons
$\frac{2}{3}$ cup	$\frac{1}{4}$ pint
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup	$\frac{1}{4}$ pint + 2 tablespoons
1 cup	$\frac{1}{4}$ pint + 6 tablespoons
$1\frac{1}{4}$ cups	$\frac{1}{2}$ pint
$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups	$\frac{1}{2}$ pint + 4 tablespoons
2 cups	$\frac{3}{4}$ pint
$2\frac{1}{2}$ cups	1 pint
3 cups	$1\frac{1}{2}$ pints
4 cups	$1\frac{1}{2}$ pints + 4 tablespoons
5 cups	2 pints

Note: The Australian and Canadian cup measures 250 mL and is only slightly larger than the U. S. cup, which is 236mL. Cooks in Australia and Canada can follow the exact measurements given in the recipes, using either the U. S. or metric measures.

SOLID MEASURES

British and Australian cooks measure more items by weight. Here are approximate equivalents for basic items in the book.

	U. S. Customary	Imperial
Cheese (grated)	½ cup 1 cup	2 oz. 4 oz.
Flour (sifted)	¼ cup	1¼ oz.
Herbs (fresh chopped)	¼ cup	¼ oz.
Meats (chopped)	1 cup	6–8 oz.
Nuts (chopped)	¼ cup ½ cup	1 oz. 2 oz.
Rice	½ cup 1 cup 2 cup	4 oz. 8 oz. 16 oz.
Vegetables (chopped)	½ cup 1 cup 2 cups	2 oz. 4 oz. 8 oz.

OVEN TEMPERATURES

British cooks should use the following settings.

Gas mark	¼	2	4	6	8
Fahrenheit	225	300	350	400	450
Celsius	110	150	180	200	230