

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Rice around the world: sushi and onigiri, congee, paella, biryani, jollof, rice and beans, and stuffed rice

9 Chapters

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COOKING SKILLS: RICE 2

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Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 1 · Sushi Rice and Onigiri

SKILL GOAL

Cook and season short-grain rice the Japanese way, and shape it into rice balls.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

This course assumes you have worked through **Cooking Skills: Rice 1**, especially absorption rice (chapter 3), the cooked-rice safety rules (chapter 2) and pilaf (chapter 5). Rice 2 takes those methods around the world, starting in Japan.

Japanese cooking relies on one rice: **short-grain Japanese rice**, plump, slightly sweet and sticky once cooked. There are three steps to cooking it well, none of which you needed for basmati: **rinse** thoroughly (until the water is only slightly milky), **soak** for 20 to 30 minutes so the grains cook through evenly, and **rest** after cooking. From there the road splits in two.

	PLAIN JAPANESE RICE	SEASONED SUSHI RICE
Used for	Onigiri, rice bowls, eating with a meal	Sushi rolls, chirashi, inari
Seasoning	Salt on your hands only	Rice vinegar, sugar and salt
Texture	Soft, sticky, plump	Slightly firmer, glossy, tangy
Eaten	Warm or cold	Room temperature

The vinegar in sushi rice isn't a preservative you can rely on. Sushi rice is still cooked rice, and it needs the same care as any other: don't leave it out for hours, and chill what you won't use soon.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Plain Japanese rice

50 minutes, mostly waiting | 2 portions | the base for onigiri

Short-grain rice is cooked by the absorption method from Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 3, with a longer rinse and a soak. Rinsing matters more here, because you want clean, shiny grains that stick together without turning to paste.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	short-grain Japanese rice (sushi rice)
190 ml	cold water

1. Put the rice in a bowl, cover with cold water, swirl with your fingers and tip the cloudy water away. Repeat **3 or 4 times**, until the water is only slightly milky.
2. Cover with fresh water and soak for **20 to 30 minutes**. Drain in a sieve and leave for 10 minutes.
3. Put the rice and the 190 ml of water in a small pan with a tight lid. Bring to the boil, stir once, then cover and cook on the lowest heat for **12 minutes**. No peeking.
4. Take off the heat and leave covered for **10 minutes**. Fluff gently with a wet spatula or rice paddle, using cutting strokes rather than stirring.

> **WHY SHORT-GRAIN?**
>
> Short-grain rice is rich in the starch that makes grains cling together, so it holds a shape. Long-grain rice (basmati, long-grain) will crumble in a rice ball and fall apart in a roll. Look for bags marked "sushi rice" or "Japanese rice"; medium-grain paella rice is a rough substitute for onigiri, not for sushi.

LEVEL 2 · SUSHI RICE

Seasoned sushi rice (su-meshi)

10 minutes, once the rice is cooked | 2 portions | the base for chapter 2

Sushi rice is plain rice mixed with a sweet-sharp vinegar dressing while it's hot. The heat lets the rice drink in the seasoning, and the fanning gives it a shine.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	short-grain rice, cooked as in the plain Japanese rice recipe (about 400 g cooked)
2 tbsp	plain rice vinegar
2 tsp	caster sugar
½ tsp	salt

1. Warm the vinegar, sugar and salt together (15 seconds in the microwave, or a minute in a small pan) and stir until the sugar has dissolved. Leave to cool.
2. Tip the hot, just-cooked rice into a wide, shallow bowl or tray (wood or plastic, not metal).
3. Pour the dressing evenly over the rice. Using a spatula, **cut and fold** with slicing strokes, as if cutting the rice into slices, turning it over. Don't stir or mash.
4. Fan the rice with a magazine or piece of card while you fold, for **3 to 5 minutes**, until it is glossy and no longer steaming. Cover with a damp tea towel.
5. Use within **1 hour**. If you aren't going to, cool it completely, put it in a covered container in the fridge and treat it as ordinary cooked rice (24 hours); it will go firm, so let it come back to room temperature for 15 to 20 minutes before rolling.

> **NO SUSHI VINEGAR?**
>
> Plain rice vinegar plus sugar and salt, as here, is the same thing as the bottled "sushi vinegar" or "sushi seasoning". If you buy it ready-made, use about 3 tablespoons for this batch, and taste.

LEVEL 2 · SHAPING

Onigiri: three (or four) fillings

30 minutes | 4 rice balls | Japanese lunchbox classic

An onigiri is a hand-shaped ball or triangle of plain, lightly salted rice with a small filling in the middle. Use plain rice (not the vinegared sushi rice), and make it while the rice is still just warm enough to handle.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1 batch	batch of plain Japanese rice (about 400 g cooked), warm or cooled, not vinegared
1	nori sheet, cut into 4 strips
½ tsp	fine salt, for your hands
20 g	hot-smoked salmon (flaky, ready to eat), flaked
½ tsp	reduced-salt soy sauce
¼	ripe avocado, mashed
½ tsp	sesame seeds
1 tsp	lemon juice
2 tbsp	tinned tuna in spring water, drained
1 tsp	light mayonnaise or natural yoghurt
1	umeboshi (pickled plum), stoned and finely chopped (optional, very salty)

1. Mix each filling in its own small bowl: the salmon with the soy; the avocado mashed with the lemon juice and sesame seeds; the tuna with the mayonnaise. Chop the pickled plum if using.
2. Fill a small bowl with water. Wet both hands, then rub a pinch of salt over your palms.
3. Scoop about **100 g** of rice (a golf-ball-and-a-half) into one palm. Press a hollow in the middle and add about **1 teaspoon of filling**.
4. Fold the rice over the filling and cup it in your hands. Press gently, turning, **3 or 4 times**, into a triangle or ball. Use firm, light pressure: too hard makes it dense, too soft and it falls apart.

5. Wrap a strip of nori round the base, so you can hold it without touching the rice. Wet and re-salt your hands before each one.

> **NOT WITH RAW FISH**
>
> Rice balls are meant to be carried and eaten later. Never fill an onigiri with raw fish, and don't use raw egg. Cooked, tinned or hot-smoked fish, avocado and pickles are fine.

LEVEL 3 · TAKE IT WITH YOU

Onigiri bento box

15 minutes, plus chilling | 1 portion | a safe packed lunch

A healthy lunchbox, and the one place where the rice safety rules really matter. Rice balls that sit in a warm bag for hours are exactly how rice goes wrong.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

2	onigiri from the previous recipe
1	medium egg, hard-boiled for 10 minutes
5 cm	cucumber, cut into sticks
50 g	edamame beans (frozen, boiled for 3 minutes and cooled)
4	cherry tomatoes
1	insulated lunch bag and a frozen ice pack

1. Cool the onigiri on a plate for no more than 30 minutes, then put them in the fridge (covered, so they don't dry out) **within 1 hour** of cooking the rice.
2. Hard-boil the egg for 10 minutes, cool it in cold water and peel. Cool the edamame in cold water and drain.
3. In the morning, pack the cold onigiri, egg, cucumber, edamame and tomatoes in a box, and put the box in the insulated bag with the **frozen ice pack**.
4. Eat the lunch the same day, ideally within **4 hours** of packing. Throw away anything that's left.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Rinse and soak

How much do the washing and the soak matter for short-grain rice?

1. Cook three small lots of 50 g rice: one unrinsed, one rinsed 4 times, and one rinsed 4 times and soaked for 30 minutes. Use 65 ml of water for each and the same time.
2. Shape a small ball from each, and taste.

Look for: The unrinsed rice is gummier and clumps into a paste, the rinsed and soaked rice has clearer, more distinct grains and an even texture throughout.

EXPERIMENT

How much vinegar

Find the seasoning you like.

1. Divide 300 g of cooked plain rice into three portions of 100 g.
2. Fold the vinegar dressing into them in amounts of 1 teaspoon, 2 teaspoons and 1 tablespoon, then fan and taste each at room temperature.

Look for: Two teaspoons per 100 g of rice is the usual balance. Notice how sharp the larger amount is, and how bland the smallest is.

EXPERIMENT

Wet hands, salt or neither

Why do recipes insist on wet, salted hands?

1. Shape one onigiri with dry hands, one with wet hands and no salt, and one with wet, salted hands.
2. Notice how much rice sticks to your fingers, then taste each.

Look for: Dry hands are covered in rice, wet hands don't stick. The salt seasons the outside, which is where your tongue meets the rice first.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Plain Japanese rice				
Seasoned sushi rice				
Onigiri (salmon)				
Onigiri (avocado)				
Onigiri (tuna)				
Rinse and soak				
Vinegar amount				
Wet hands vs dry				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Rice is gluey or mushy	Not rinsed enough, or too much water	Rinse until nearly clear, and measure carefully
Rice is hard in the middle	Not soaked, or the lid was lifted	Soak first and keep the lid on; add 2 tablespoons of hot water and cook 3 minutes more
Rice too sour or too sweet	Dressing out of balance	Taste the dressing before adding; use less next time
Onigiri falls apart	Rice too dry or cold, or pressed too gently	Use rice that is just warm, wet your hands and press firmly
Onigiri rock hard	Squeezed too hard	Use gentle but firm pressure; 3 or 4 presses is enough
Sushi rice is mushy after folding	Stirred, not cut	Use slicing strokes and fold, don't stir

FOOD SAFETY: RICE BALLS, SUSHI RICE AND LUNCHBOXES

Plain and sushi rice are cooked rice, so the rules from Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 2, apply. Cool quickly, refrigerate within 1 hour and use within 24 hours. A lunchbox needs a **frozen ice pack and an insulated bag**, and any uneaten rice is thrown away at the end of the day. If you have a fridge at work, use it.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can rinse, soak and cook short-grain rice.
- ☐ I can season sushi rice with vinegar without mashing it.
- ☐ I can shape a firm onigiri with a filling inside.
- ☐ I know why rice balls need chilling and an ice pack.
- ☐ I know why raw fish does not belong in a rice ball.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Rice 2, chapter 2 is Sushi at Home: hand rolls, maki rolls, inari pockets and a chirashi bowl, with a box for making any of them with raw fish.

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 2 · Sushi at Home

SKILL GOAL

Make sushi at home without special skills, from a bowl of scattered toppings to a sliced roll.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Sushi is rice, a filling and (usually) nori seaweed, nothing more. The craft is in the rice, which you've done in chapter 1, and in the handling: wet hands, a light touch, a sharp knife. Everything is much easier if you set up first: a bowl of water with a splash of vinegar for your fingers, a board, a very sharp wet knife, and your fillings cut and ready.

TYPE	WHAT IT IS	DIFFICULTY
Chirashi	Toppings scattered over a bowl of sushi rice	Easiest
Inari	Sushi rice in a sweet tofu pocket	Easy
Temaki (hand roll)	A nori cone you fill and eat at once	Easy
Maki	A rolled log of rice and filling wrapped in nori, sliced	Takes practice

In this chapter the fish is **cooked or hot-smoked**, not raw. Hot-smoked salmon is the soft, flaky kind sold ready to eat (not the thin cold-smoked slices). Raw fish is covered in the box after the recipes.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Hand rolls (temaki)

20 minutes | 2 portions (4 cones) | no rolling mat needed

The easiest sushi, and the most fun. Everything is laid out on the table and each person rolls their own cone. Nori goes soft quickly, so roll and eat at once.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

160 g	seasoned sushi rice, made in chapter 1 (a bit under half the batch)
2	nori sheets, each cut in half
5 cm	cucumber, cut into thin sticks
½	ripe avocado, sliced
60 g	hot-smoked salmon (flaky, ready to eat), in strips
1 tsp	sesame seeds
2 tbsp	reduced-salt soy sauce, for dipping
1 tsp	wasabi paste
1 tbsp	pickled ginger

1. Lay out the rice, fillings, soy sauce, wasabi and ginger on the table. Keep the nori in a bag or box until needed.
2. Hold a half-sheet of nori shiny side down, in your left palm (right if you're left-handed). Spread about **40 g of rice** over the left third, leaving the rest bare.
3. Lay a little cucumber, avocado and salmon on a diagonal across the rice, sprinkle sesame seeds on top.
4. Fold the bottom-left corner up and over the filling, then roll it into a cone. Seal the end with a grain of rice. Eat immediately, dipping in soy sauce with a touch of wasabi.

LEVEL 2 · ROLLING

Maki rolls: cucumber and avocado, salmon and cucumber

35 minutes | 2 portions (2 rolls, 12 pieces) | needs a sharp knife

Maki are the classic rolls, with the nori on the outside. The first one is the hardest, the second is fine, and by the third you've got it.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

240 g	seasoned sushi rice (the rest of a 400 g batch from chapter 1)
2	nori sheets
5 cm	cucumber, cut into long thin sticks
½	ripe avocado, sliced
60 g	hot-smoked salmon, in strips
1	bamboo rolling mat, wrapped in cling film (or a clean tea towel and cling film)
1	small bowl of water with a splash of rice vinegar, for your fingers
2 tbsp	reduced-salt soy sauce, to serve
1 tbsp	pickled ginger and wasabi, to serve

1. Lay the mat on the board with the slats running across you, cling film on top. Put a nori sheet on it, shiny side down.
2. Wet your fingers. Spread **120 g of rice** evenly over the nori with a gentle patting motion, leaving a **2 cm strip bare** at the far edge.
3. Lay your filling in a line across the middle of the rice (cucumber and avocado for the first roll, salmon and cucumber for the second). Don't overfill.
4. Lift the edge of the mat nearest you and roll it up and over the filling, tucking the edge in firmly. Keep rolling, pressing gently, until you reach the bare strip. Dab the strip with water to seal.
5. Wet a very sharp knife, and cut the roll in half, then each half into three. Wipe and re-wet the blade between cuts. Serve with soy, ginger and wasabi.

LEVEL 2 · QUICK

Inari pockets

15 minutes | 2 portions (6 pockets) | the no-rolling option

Sweet-savoury tofu pockets, sold ready seasoned, filled with sushi rice. They're about the easiest sushi there is.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	seasoned sushi rice
6	ready-made seasoned tofu pockets (inari age), from a pack or tin
1 tsp	toasted sesame seeds
1 tbsp	pickled ginger, finely chopped
30 g	cooked edamame beans or peas

1. Fold the sesame seeds, ginger and edamame through the rice.
2. Gently squeeze each pocket to remove excess liquid and open it with your fingers.
3. Fill each with about 25 g of rice, pressing it into the corners, and fold the flap over. Serve flap side down.

LEVEL 3 · SCATTERED

Chirashi bowl

20 minutes | 1 portion | colourful, no rolling at all

"Scattered sushi": a bowl of sushi rice with toppings arranged on top. All the flavour of sushi with none of the technique.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

175 g	seasoned sushi rice
60 g	cooked peeled prawns
1	medium egg, beaten
1 tsp	oil
5 cm	cucumber, thinly sliced
¼	ripe avocado, sliced
½	nori sheet, cut into thin strips with scissors
1 tsp	sesame seeds
1 tsp	pickled ginger
1 tsp	reduced-salt soy sauce

1. Beat the egg. Heat the oil in a small non-stick pan over a medium heat, pour in the egg and swirl to make a thin omelette. Cook for 1 minute, until set, slide it out and let it cool, then roll up and slice into thin ribbons.
2. Put the rice in a wide bowl. Arrange the prawns, egg ribbons, cucumber and avocado in sections on top.
3. Scatter over the nori strips and sesame seeds, add the ginger, and drizzle with the soy sauce.

MAKING IT WITH RAW FISH

Every recipe above uses cooked or hot-smoked fish. To use raw fish instead, leave out the cooking: lay thin slices of raw fish where the cooked fish goes. Where raw fish needs something different, it is said below. Raw fish carries more risk than cooked fish, so read this before you decide.

Who should avoid raw fish: the Food Standards Agency lists pregnant women, children under 5, people aged 65 and over, and anyone with a weakened immune system (for example from illness or treatment) as more vulnerable to food poisoning. They should not eat it raw.

When buying:

- Buy from a **fishmonger or supermarket fish counter you trust**, tell them it is for eating raw, and ask them directly. "Sushi-grade" is a marketing phrase, not a legal standard in the UK, and does not guarantee anything.
- **Parasites:** for fish that is sold to be eaten raw, UK rules for food businesses require freezing to **-20°C or colder for at least 24 hours** (or -35°C for 15 hours), because that kills parasites such as anisakis worms. Farmed Atlantic salmon is exempt from this requirement, as the way it is reared leaves a minimal parasite risk. Wild fish is not exempt. **A home freezer is usually about -18°C and not reliably cold enough**, so the safest choice is fish sold as *suitable for eating raw*, or one your fishmonger confirms has been frozen to the standard. Don't rely on freezing it yourself.
- Look for **fresh-looking fish**: firm, springy flesh that bounces back when pressed, a clean, mild smell of the sea (not "fishy" or sour), bright translucent colour, no brown edges, no slime, no pooled liquid in the pack. If whole, eyes should be clear and bright.
- Buy it **last** on your shopping trip, keep it cold (an insulated bag with an ice pack) and get it into the fridge straight away. Use it the same day, or the next day at the latest.
- **Salmon and tuna** are the usual choices for beginners. Avoid raw shellfish.

When making:

- Keep the fish in the **fridge until the moment you slice it**, and put the slices back in the fridge until you assemble.
- Use a **clean board and a very sharp knife** that are only used for raw fish; wash them, your hands and the work surface in hot soapy water afterwards. Cut with long, single strokes, about 5 mm thick, across the grain.
- Make the **rice first** and let it cool to room temperature before the fish touches it. Warm rice warms the fish.
- **Assemble last and eat at once.** Don't leave raw fish sushi out for more than an hour, and don't keep leftovers: throw them away.
- Check each slice as you cut, and discard anything with a worm, a strong smell, or a slimy surface.

Changes to the recipes: in hand rolls, maki and chirashi, use raw fish instead of the smoked salmon (about 60 g) and prawns; no other change is needed. Smoked salmon is salty, so raw fish makes the roll blander and you may want a little more soy sauce, wasabi or ginger. Inari and onigiri are not suitable for raw fish.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

How much rice

Most beginners use too much rice.

1. Make three cucumber maki rolls with 80 g, 120 g and 160 g of rice.
2. Slice and compare the rolls, noting how easy each is to roll, how it looks and how it tastes.

Look for: At 160 g the nori is hard to close and the roll is mostly rice. At 80 g the filling is easier to taste. 120 g is the usual starting point.

EXPERIMENT

Toasted nori

Does toasting the seaweed matter?

1. Take two nori sheets. Wave one briefly (about 5 seconds each side) over a gas flame or on a dry hot frying pan until it turns slightly greener and crisp.
2. Use each to make a hand roll and eat them at once.

Look for: The toasted nori is crisper and more fragrant, the untoasted is chewy.

EXPERIMENT

Wet knife or dry knife

How do you cut a roll without squashing it?

1. Roll two identical maki. Cut one with a dry knife and one with a knife dipped in water between every cut.
2. Compare the cut ends.

Look for: The dry knife drags and squashes the rice. A sharp, wet knife slides through. If neither works, your knife needs sharpening.

EXPERIMENT

With a mat or without

Do you need a bamboo mat?

1. Roll one maki on a bamboo mat and one on a sheet of cling film or a clean, thin tea towel.

Look for: The film does the same job as the mat. Use whichever is easier to keep clean.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Hand rolls				
Cucumber and avocado maki				
Salmon and cucumber maki				
Inari pockets				
Chirashi bowl				
Amount of rice				
Toasted nori				
Wet vs dry knife				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Roll falls apart	Too much rice or filling, or rolled too loosely	Use less of both; tuck the edge in tightly at the first turn

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Nori tears	Rice too wet or nori damp	Pat the rice drier; keep the nori away from steam
Nori is chewy and tough	Old or humid nori, or the roll stood too long	Store nori sealed; eat rolls soon after making
Rice sticks to the knife	Dry knife	Wet the blade before every cut
Rice is hard and cold	Rice came straight from the fridge	Let it return to room temperature before rolling
Filling falls out of the ends	Overfilled, or not centred	Keep the filling to a thin line in the middle

FOOD SAFETY: SUSHI

Sushi is cold or room-temperature cooked rice with fish, so treat it as food that must be kept cold. Eat sushi within an hour or two of making, and put anything you aren't eating straight into the fridge. Rolls with cooked or smoked fish can be kept in the fridge for up to 24 hours (the nori will go soft). Throw out anything left in a lunchbox or on the table at the end of a meal.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a hand roll and a maki roll.
- ☐ I can use a wet knife to cut a roll cleanly.
- ☐ I can make a chirashi bowl without any rolling.
- ☐ I know the signs of fresh fish and the parasite and freezing rules before using it raw.
- ☐ I know who should not eat raw fish.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Rice 2, chapter 3 is Congee and Rice Porridge: rice cooked slowly in plenty of water until it breaks down, with ginger, chicken, and egg and greens.

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 3 · Congee and Rice Porridge

SKILL GOAL

Cook rice in a lot of water until it breaks down into a creamy porridge.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Congee is rice porridge, eaten across Asia for breakfast, as comfort food when you're ill and as a late-night supper. It's cheap, forgiving and very easy to digest. It's also a lesson in what rice does when you stop trying to keep the grains whole.

The method is nothing more than **a little rice, a lot of water and a long time**. The rice-to-water ratio decides how thick it is, and it keeps thickening as it cools.

RICE : WATER (VOLUME)	RESULT	COOKING TIME
1 : 6	Thick, closer to a risotto	About 45 minutes
1 : 8	Creamy, spoonable porridge	About 60 minutes
1 : 10 to 1 : 12	Thin, silky, drinkable	75 to 90 minutes

- **Use a heavy pan** with a lid you can set ajar. Congee catches on thin pans.
- **Stir from the bottom** every 10 minutes or so. Constant stirring isn't needed.
- **Season at the end.** Plain congee is mild, and it's the toppings that make it.
- **Keep boiling water handy.** Congee thickens as it stands, so loosen it with boiling water, not cold.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Basic congee

1 hour 15 minutes, mostly unattended | 2 bowls | the blank canvas

Congee (jook in Cantonese) is rice boiled with a lot of water until the grains burst and it becomes a soft, creamy porridge. It's the opposite of fluffy rice: here you want the rice to break down. Eat it plain to start, and see what you've made before adding anything.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

50 g	jasmine or long-grain white rice
700 ml	water
½ tsp	salt

1. Rinse the rice, drain it and put it in a medium, heavy pan with the water and salt. Bring to the boil, uncovered.
2. Turn the heat down to a gentle simmer, and set the lid **ajar**. Cook for **60 to 75 minutes**, stirring every 10 minutes or so and scraping the bottom, until the grains have burst and the porridge is thick and creamy.
3. If it gets too thick, stir in a splash of boiling water from the kettle. Taste and add a little more salt if needed.

> **WHY SO LONG?**
>
> Rice cooked normally keeps its shape. In congee the long, gentle cooking in plenty of water breaks the grains down and releases their starch, which is what makes it thick and silky. A rapid boil does the opposite: it makes the base stick and the top watery.

LEVEL 2 · FLAVOUR

Ginger and spring onion congee

1 hour 15 minutes | 2 bowls | comforting and light

The classic seasoning for congee. Ginger is simmered with the rice from the start, so its warmth runs right through, and the sharp toppings go on at the end.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1 batch	batch of basic congee (above), hot
3	thin slices of fresh ginger, added at the start
2	spring onions, thinly sliced
1 tsp	reduced-salt soy sauce
½ tsp	toasted sesame oil
1 pinch	white pepper

1. Make the basic congee, adding the ginger slices to the pan with the water at the start.
2. When the congee is ready, fish out and discard the ginger. Ladle it into two bowls.
3. Top each with spring onion, a few drops of soy sauce and sesame oil, and a pinch of white pepper.

LEVEL 2 · A MEAL

Chicken congee

1 hour 20 minutes | 2 bowls | a real supper

Thin slices of chicken cook in the hot congee in a few minutes, and the cornflour coating keeps them tender.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

50 g	jasmine or long-grain white rice
600 ml	water
150 ml	reduced-salt chicken stock
120 g	chicken breast or boneless thigh, sliced as thinly as you can
1 tsp	reduced-salt soy sauce
1 tsp	cornflour
3	thin slices of fresh ginger
1	spring onion, sliced
1 tbsp	chopped coriander
½ tsp	toasted sesame oil

1. Mix the chicken with the soy sauce and cornflour and leave to marinate while the congee cooks.
2. Cook the rice with the water, stock and ginger as for the basic congee, for **60 to 75 minutes**.
3. Bring the congee to a gentle simmer. Stir in the chicken, a piece at a time so they don't clump, and cook for **4 to 5 minutes** until no pink remains in any piece.
4. Serve in bowls with the spring onion, coriander and sesame oil.

LEVEL 3 · HEALTHY

Egg and greens congee

1 hour 20 minutes | 2 bowls | vegetarian

A soft-boiled egg melts into the congee like a sauce, and greens wilt in the heat. A complete, light meal.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1 batch	batch of basic congee, hot
2	medium eggs, each boiled for 6 minutes, peeled and halved
150 g	pak choi or spinach, chopped
1 tsp	reduced-salt soy sauce
1 tsp	toasted sesame seeds
1	spring onion, sliced

1. Make the basic congee. For the last **3 minutes**, stir in the pak choi or spinach until it wilts.
2. Boil the eggs for 6 minutes, cool under cold water, peel and halve.
3. Ladle the congee into two bowls, top each with an egg, soy sauce, sesame seeds and spring onion.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Three thicknesses

Find the ratio you like best.

1. Cook three small pans, each with 30 g of rinsed rice and with 180 ml, 240 ml and 300 ml of water (about 1 : 6, 1 : 8 and 1 : 10).
2. Cook all for about an hour, topping up with boiling water if the pan looks dry.
3. Taste, and compare how much each thickens when it cools.

Look for: The thinnest is silky and light, the thickest is closer to a risotto. Your favourite is the one you'll make.

EXPERIMENT

Stirred or left alone

How much does stirring change the congee?

1. Make two small pans. Stir one every 10 minutes and the other not at all until the end.
2. Compare the texture and what has stuck to the bottom.

Look for: The unstirred pan may have a thick bottom layer and watery top, the stirred pan is more even and creamier.

EXPERIMENT

Toppings early or late

When should the flavours go in?

1. Make two basic congees. In one, add the ginger and spring onion at the start. In the other, add them only when serving.
2. Taste both.

Look for: Early additions give a mellow, infused flavour, late additions are sharp and fresh. Try combining both, as in the ginger congee.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Basic congee				
Ginger and spring onion				
Chicken congee				
Egg and greens				
Three thicknesses				
Stirred vs unstirred				
Toppings early vs late				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Congee is watery with whole grains	Not cooked long enough, or the heat was too high	Keep cooking at a gentle simmer until the grains burst
Congee is too thick or like paste	Too little water, or it stood and thickened	Stir in boiling water to loosen it
Burnt layer on the bottom	Not stirred, or heat too high	Lower the heat, use a heavy pan and stir the bottom regularly; don't scrape the burnt part in
Bland	Not enough salt or toppings	Season at the end and add soy, ginger, white pepper and sesame oil
Boils over	Lid fully on, or heat too high	Lid ajar, gentle simmer, bigger pan

FOOD SAFETY: CONGEE

Congee is cooked rice, and a big pot cools slowly. Don't leave it on the hob or in a slow cooker on "warm" for hours. Cool leftovers quickly (divide into shallow containers), refrigerate within 1 hour, eat within 24 hours, and reheat once until steaming hot, adding boiling water to loosen it. Chicken congee should be steaming hot with no pink chicken.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make congee at the thickness I like.
- ☐ I know why it needs a long, gentle cook.
- ☐ I can add flavour at the right moments.
- ☐ I can cook thin slices of chicken in it safely.
- ☐ I can cool and reheat it safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Rice 2, chapter 4 is Paella and Spanish Rice: a wide pan, a sofrito, rice that isn't stirred, and the crispy base called socarrat.

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 4 · Paella and Spanish Rice

SKILL GOAL

Cook paella the Spanish way: a wide pan, a good sofrito, rice left alone, and a crisp crust underneath.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Paella comes from Valencia, and the name is the pan (*paella*), not the dish. The idea is simple: a thin layer of rice cooks in just enough stock to be absorbed completely, in a wide pan, over an even heat. A pan 28 to 30 cm across is about right for 2 portions. A paella pan is ideal, but any wide, flat-bottomed frying pan will do. Do not use a deep saucepan.

Four things that make it paella

1. **The rice.** Spanish paella rice (*bomba*, *calasparra*) is a short-grain rice that drinks up to three times its volume in stock without going mushy. Risotto rice such as arborio is the best substitute; long-grain rice is a poor one.
2. **The sofrito.** A slow-cooked mixture of onion, garlic, tomato and paprika, which gives the rice its depth.
3. **The colour.** Saffron is traditional; a pinch of turmeric gives a similar colour, with a different flavour.
4. **The crust.** A final minute of high heat toasts the bottom layer of rice into the crisp *socarrat*. The cook listens for a crackle, and smells, before it burns.

RICE	STOCK (BY VOLUME)	RESULT
Bomba or calasparra	About 1 : 3	Separate, tender grains, holds the crust
Arborio or risotto rice	About 1 : 2.5 to 1 : 3	Slightly creamier, still good

RICE	STOCK (BY VOLUME)	RESULT
Long-grain rice	About 1 : 2	Fluffy but no crust, a poor choice

No wine is needed: the stock and lemon give the sharpness.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Vegetable arroz

45 minutes | 2 portions | wide pan, no stirring

Spanish rice is cooked in a wide, shallow pan so that it forms a thin layer, with the stock absorbed evenly and a crust forming at the bottom. This is the simplest version: a vegetable paella.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	paella rice (bomba or calasparra) or risotto rice
2 tbsp	olive oil
1	small onion, finely chopped
2	garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 tsp	sweet smoked paprika (pimentón dulce)
1	ripe tomato, grated (discard the skin)
1	red pepper, cut into strips
80 g	green beans, cut into 3 cm pieces
1 pinch	saffron threads (or ½ tsp ground turmeric)
500 ml	hot vegetable stock
1	lemon, cut into wedges

1. Crumble the saffron into 3 tablespoons of the hot stock and leave it to soak (turmeric can just go in the stock).
2. Heat the oil in a wide frying pan (28 to 30 cm) over a medium heat. Fry the onion and pepper for **6 minutes**, add the garlic, paprika and grated tomato, and cook for **5 minutes** until thick and jammy. This is the *sofrito*, the flavour base.
3. Add the rice and stir for 1 minute to coat in the sofrito. Pour in the hot stock and the saffron, add the green beans and a pinch of salt, and stir **once**, spreading the rice evenly.
4. Simmer **without stirring** for **16 to 18 minutes**, turning the pan if one side cooks faster, until the stock has been absorbed and the rice is tender.

5. For the crust (*socarrat*): turn the heat up for **1 minute** and listen for a light crackle. Don't let it burn. Take off the heat, cover with a tea towel and rest for **5 minutes**. Serve with lemon wedges.

> **STIR ONCE, THEN STOP**
>
> Stirring risotto rice makes it creamy. In paella you want separate grains with a crust, so you stir once to spread the rice and then leave it alone.

LEVEL 2 · CLASSIC

Chicken and pea paella

50 minutes | 2 portions | the everyday paella

Chicken is browned first, so the pan base picks up its flavour. Peas go on the top near the end to stay green.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	paella rice (bomba or calasparra) or risotto rice
200 g	boneless, skinless chicken thigh, cut into 2 cm pieces
2 tbsp	olive oil
1	small onion, finely chopped
2	garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 tsp	sweet smoked paprika (pimentón dulce)
1	ripe tomato, grated (discard the skin)
1	red pepper, cut into strips
1 pinch	saffron threads (or ½ tsp ground turmeric)
500 ml	hot reduced-salt chicken stock
80 g	frozen peas
1	lemon, cut into wedges

1. Soak the saffron in 3 tablespoons of hot stock. Season the chicken with salt and pepper.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a wide pan over a medium-high heat and brown the chicken for **5 to 6 minutes**. Take it out and set it aside.
3. Add the remaining oil, the onion and the pepper and cook for 6 minutes. Add the garlic, paprika and tomato and cook down for 5 minutes.
4. Add the rice and stir for 1 minute. Pour in the hot stock and saffron, return the chicken, stir once, and simmer **without stirring** for 12 minutes.
5. Scatter the peas on top and simmer for **5 more minutes**, until the rice is tender and the stock has gone.

6. Make the socarrat (1 minute on high heat, listening for the crackle), rest under a tea towel for 5 minutes and serve with lemon. Check that the thickest piece of chicken is white all through.

LEVEL 3 · SPECIAL

Seafood paella

50 minutes | 2 portions | swap for chicken if you prefer

The same method with seafood on top. The fish needs only a few minutes at the end, so it is added late and not stirred in. If you'd rather not use seafood, make the chicken and pea paella.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	paella rice (bomba or calasparra) or risotto rice
120 g	raw peeled king prawns
150 g	firm white fish (cod, haddock or hake), skinned and cut into 3 cm chunks
2 tbsp	olive oil
1	small onion, finely chopped
2	garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 tsp	sweet smoked paprika (pimentón dulce)
1	ripe tomato, grated (discard the skin)
1	red pepper, cut into strips
1 pinch	saffron threads (or ½ tsp ground turmeric)
500 ml	hot fish or vegetable stock
100 g	mussels, scrubbed (optional)
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1	lemon, cut into wedges

1. Soak the saffron in 3 tablespoons of the hot stock. Make the sofrito as in the vegetable arroz (onion, pepper, garlic, paprika, tomato).
2. Add the rice and stir for 1 minute. Pour in the hot stock and saffron, stir once, and simmer **without stirring** for **12 minutes**.
3. Press the fish chunks and prawns into the rice, and arrange the mussels (if using) on top with the hinge down. Cover with foil or a lid, and cook for **5 to 6 minutes**, until the

prawns are pink, the fish is opaque and the mussels have opened.

4. **Throw away any mussel that has not opened.** Do the 1-minute socarrat, rest under a tea towel for 5 minutes, scatter with parsley and serve with lemon.

> **MUSSELS**
>
> Before cooking, throw away any mussel that is open and doesn't close when you tap it, or that has a cracked shell. After cooking, throw away any that stayed closed.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Three kinds of rice

See why paella rice matters.

1. Make three small vegetable arroz, one each with bomba (or calasparra), risotto rice and long-grain rice. Use 75 g rice and 250 ml stock each, in a pan of the same size.
2. Compare the grains, the crust and the texture after resting.

Look for: The long-grain version dries out without developing a crust, the risotto rice is closer to the original. Is the specialist rice worth it for you?

EXPERIMENT

Stir or don't

Test the no-stirring rule.

1. Make two small arroz. Stir one every few minutes. Leave the other alone after the first stir.
2. Compare how creamy, and how crisp at the bottom, each is.

Look for: The stirred pan is creamier, like a risotto, and the unstirred one has separate grains and a crust.

EXPERIMENT

Wide pan or deep pan

Why does the shape of the pan matter?

1. Cook the same amount of rice and stock in a wide 28 cm frying pan and in a smaller, deeper saucepan.
2. Compare how evenly the rice cooks and the crust at the bottom.

Look for: In the deep pan the rice is deeper, so the top may stay hard while the bottom is soft, and there's less crust.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Vegetable arroz				
Chicken and pea paella				
Seafood paella				
Three kinds of rice				
Stirred vs unstirred				
Wide pan vs deep pan				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Rice hard on top, wet below	Pan too small or the heat uneven	Use a wider pan; rotate it; cover with foil for the last few minutes
Mushy and creamy	Stirred too much, or too much stock	Stir once; measure the stock

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
No crust	Final heat skipped or too low	Turn up the heat for the last minute and listen for the crackle
Burnt base	Heat too high, too long	Take off the heat sooner; the crackle is a warning, not a target
Pale and bland	No sofrito, no paprika, no salt	Cook the sofrito until jammy and taste the stock
Dry seafood	Cooked too long	Add the seafood in the last 5 or 6 minutes

FOOD SAFETY: PAELLA

Paella is cooked rice with meat or seafood, so cool leftovers quickly, refrigerate within 1 hour, eat within 24 hours and reheat once until steaming hot. Cook chicken until no pink remains, fish until opaque, and prawns until pink. Throw away any mussel that doesn't open.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a sofrito and use it to flavour rice.
- ☐ I know why paella is cooked in a wide pan and left unstirred.
- ☐ I can get a crust (socarrat) without burning the rice.
- ☐ I can tell when chicken and seafood are cooked.
- ☐ I know when to use paella rice and what to use instead.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Rice 2, chapter 5 is Biryani and Layered Rice: part-cooking the rice and then steaming it in layers with spiced vegetables or chicken.

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 5 · Biryani and Layered Rice

SKILL GOAL

Part-cook rice, layer it over a spiced filling, and steam it in a sealed pan.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Biryani comes from the Indian subcontinent, where it is made for festivals and weddings, and every region has its own. They share one technique: **layering**. Part-cooked rice is laid over a spiced filling in a heavy pan, which is sealed and cooked on a very low heat, so that steam from the filling finishes cooking the rice and carries the flavour into it.

STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS	WHY
Rinse and soak the rice	Basmati, 20 minutes	Long grains cook evenly and don't snap
Par-boil in salted spiced water	About 5 minutes, drain at once	Seasons the rice and gets it to about 70% cooked
Cook the filling until thick	Sauce should coat, not pool	Excess water would make the rice soggy
Layer rice over the filling	Herbs, fried onion, saffron milk on top	Colour and fragrance
Seal and cook on the lowest heat (*dum*)	Foil under the lid, 20 to 25 minutes	The steam finishes the rice
Rest before serving	5 minutes, undisturbed	Moisture spreads evenly

Biryani can be a rich, ghee-heavy dish. Here it is made with a little oil and plenty of vegetables and yoghurt, which keeps it generally healthy; add a spoonful of ghee on top if you want the full treat.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Quick vegetable biryani

1 hour | 2 portions | the layering method

Biryani is rice and a spiced filling cooked together in layers. The rice is only part-cooked first, then finishes in the steam rising from the filling, which is called *dum* cooking. The result is that every grain of rice is flavoured.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	basmati rice
1.5 litres	water
1 tsp	salt
3	cardamom pods
1	bay leaf
1	small cinnamon stick
1 tbsp	oil
1	large onion, thinly sliced
2	garlic cloves, crushed
1 tsp	grated fresh ginger
1 tsp	garam masala
½ tsp	ground turmeric
½ tsp	chilli powder or paprika
300 g	mixed vegetables (cauliflower florets, diced carrot, green beans)
100 g	natural yoghurt
50 g	frozen peas
2 tbsp	chopped coriander
2 tbsp	chopped mint
3 tbsp	warm milk with a pinch of saffron (or ¼ tsp turmeric)

1. Rinse the basmati until the water runs nearly clear, then soak in cold water for 20 minutes. Drain.
2. Heat the oil in a wide, heavy pan with a tight lid. Fry the onion over a medium heat for **10 to 12 minutes**, until golden brown. Take out a third of the onion and set it aside for the top.
3. Add the garlic, ginger and spices and stir for 30 seconds. Add the vegetables, yoghurt and 3 tablespoons of water. Cover and simmer for **10 minutes** until the vegetables are nearly tender. Stir in the peas. The filling should be thick, not watery. Spread it flat.
4. Meanwhile, bring the 1.5 litres of water to the boil with the salt and whole spices. Add the soaked rice and boil for **5 minutes**, until it is about 70% cooked: a grain should break easily when pressed but still have a firm core. Drain at once.
5. Spoon the rice over the filling in an even layer. Scatter over the reserved onion, the coriander and mint, and drizzle with the saffron milk.
6. Cover the pan with foil, press it down round the edge, and put the lid on top. Cook on the **lowest heat for 20 minutes**. Turn off the heat and leave for **5 minutes**.
7. Remove the whole spices and serve by digging down to take both layers in each spoonful.

> **DON'T BOIL THE RICE TO DEATH**
>
> The par-boil is where biryani goes wrong. The rice must still have a firm core when drained, because it finishes cooking in steam. Rice that is soft in the water turns to mush in the pan.

LEVEL 2 · CLASSIC

Chicken biryani

1 hour 15 minutes, plus marinating | 2 portions | the real thing

Chicken is marinated in spiced yoghurt, which tenderises it and flavours the sauce. It must be cooked almost through before the rice goes on top.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	basmati rice
250 g	boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 3 cm pieces
100 g	natural yoghurt
1 tsp	garam masala
½ tsp	ground turmeric
½ tsp	chilli powder or paprika
1 tsp	grated fresh ginger
2	garlic cloves, crushed
½	lemon, juiced
½ tsp	salt
1 tbsp	oil
1	large onion, thinly sliced
1.5 litres	water, with 1 tsp salt and the whole spices from the vegetable biryani, for par-boiling
2 tbsp	chopped coriander
2 tbsp	chopped mint
3 tbsp	warm milk with a pinch of saffron (or ¼ tsp turmeric)

1. Mix the chicken with the yoghurt, spices, ginger, garlic, lemon juice and salt. Cover and marinate in the fridge for at least **1 hour**, or overnight.
2. Rinse and soak the rice for 20 minutes. Fry the onion in the oil in a wide, heavy pan with a lid for 10 to 12 minutes until golden. Take out a third for the top.

3. Add the chicken and all the marinade to the pan. Cook, covered, for **12 to 15 minutes**, stirring once or twice, until the chicken is almost cooked through and the sauce is thick. Spread flat.
4. Boil the rice for 5 minutes in the salted spiced water and drain. Layer it over the chicken, then the reserved onion, herbs and saffron milk.
5. Cover tightly with foil and the lid and cook on the **lowest heat for 25 minutes**. Rest for 5 minutes.
6. Check by cutting open the largest piece of chicken: it must be white all through with no pink. Serve with raita.

LEVEL 1 · SIDE

Raita

5 minutes | 2 portions | cool and refreshing

A cool yoghurt dip to serve beside any hot, spiced rice.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	natural yoghurt
5 cm	cucumber, grated and squeezed dry
1 tbsp	chopped mint
¼ tsp	ground cumin
1 pinch	salt

1. Squeeze the grated cucumber in a clean tea towel until it stops dripping. Stir it into the yoghurt with the mint, cumin and salt. Chill until needed.

LEVEL 2 · LAYERS

Saffron layered rice

45 minutes | 2 portions | a side dish for curries

The same layering idea without a filling: half the rice stays white, half is stained golden with saffron, and the two layers are steamed together.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	basmati rice
1.5 litres	water
1 tsp	salt
3 tbsp	warm milk
1 pinch	saffron threads (or ¼ tsp turmeric)
1 tsp	butter or ghee
1	small cinnamon stick

1. Soak the saffron in the warm milk for 15 minutes. Rinse the rice and soak it for 20 minutes. Drain.
2. Boil the rice in the salted water with the cinnamon for **5 minutes**, until it is about 70% cooked. Drain.
3. Grease a heavy pan with half the butter. Spread half the rice in the pan. Drizzle the saffron milk over the remaining rice and mix lightly, then spread it over the white layer. Dot with the rest of the butter.
4. Cover with foil and a tight lid and cook on the **lowest heat for 15 minutes**. Rest for 5 minutes, then fluff gently so the colours marble.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

How far to par-boil

Find the right moment to drain the rice.

1. Make three small batches of saffron layered rice. Par-boil the rice for 3 minutes (about 50%), 5 minutes (about 70%) and 7 minutes (about 90%).
2. Finish each with the same 15 minutes of steaming and taste.

Look for: The 3-minute rice is hard in the middle, the 7-minute rice is soft and clumped. The 5-minute version is the target, but your pan and your rice may favour 4 or 6.

EXPERIMENT

Foil and lid or lid alone

How much does the seal matter?

1. Make two small vegetable biryanis. Seal one with foil under the lid. Cook the other with the lid only.
2. Compare how much steam escapes, and how evenly the rice cooks.

Look for: Without the seal, steam escapes, the top layer stays hard and the bottom layer catches. The seal is what makes biryani work.

EXPERIMENT

Rest or serve at once

Does five minutes make a difference?

1. Make a vegetable biryani. Serve half immediately and leave the other half, covered, for 5 minutes, then 15 minutes.
2. Taste the three.

Look for: Resting evens out the moisture, but too long and the rice starts to go gummy and cool. Find the sweet spot.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Vegetable biryani				
Chicken biryani				
Raita				
Saffron layered rice				
Par-boil 3, 5 and 7 minutes				
Foil vs lid alone				
Resting times				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Rice mushy and clumped	Par-boiled too long, or the filling too wet	Drain earlier; cook the filling until thick
Rice hard and dry on top	Seal leaked, or rice under-par-boiled	Foil under the lid; add 2 tablespoons of hot water and cook 5 more minutes
Burnt base	Heat too high, or pan too thin	Lowest heat and a heavy pan, or a heat-diffuser
Bland rice	Par-boil water not salted, no herbs or spices	Salt the water properly and finish with herbs and saffron milk
Chicken undercooked	Pieces too big, or not enough pre-cooking	Cut smaller and cook the chicken for longer before layering
Filling watery	Vegetables released too much water	Cook uncovered for the last few minutes of the filling

FOOD SAFETY: BIRYANI

Biryani is cooked rice with chicken, so the usual rules apply: cool leftovers quickly, refrigerate within 1 hour, eat within 24 hours, and reheat once until steaming hot all through. Don't keep it warm in a low oven for hours before serving. Check the chicken is cooked through with no pink.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can par-boil rice to the right point.
- ☐ I can build and seal a layered dish.
- ☐ I know why the filling must be thick.
- ☐ I can marinate chicken in yoghurt and cook it through safely.
- ☐ I can make raita to go with it.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Rice 2, chapter 6 is Jollof and West African Rice: cooking rice in a rich tomato and pepper base.

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 6 · Jollof and West African Rice

SKILL GOAL

Cook rice in a thick tomato-and-pepper sauce so every grain takes on its flavour.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Jollof rice is cooked all over West Africa, and the best way to start an argument at a Nigerian, Ghanaian or Senegalese dinner table is to say whose is best. They share one idea: rice is cooked **in a rich tomato-and-pepper sauce**, so every grain takes on its colour and taste.

STEP	WHAT TO DO	WHY
Blend the base	Red pepper, onion, tomato, chilli	Smooth sauce, even flavour
Fry it down	Simmer until thick and the oil separates	Removes the raw tomato taste and deepens the colour
Add rice and stock	Rinsed parboiled rice and hot stock	Rice cooks in the sauce
Seal and steam	Foil under a tight lid, lowest heat	Steam finishes the rice without stirring
Rest, then fluff	10 minutes off the heat	Moisture evens out

Easy-cook (parboiled) rice holds its shape in a lot of sauce, and the grains stay separate. Ordinary long-grain rice also works, but it cooks faster and needs less liquid (see the experiment).

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Basic jollof rice

1 hour | 2 portions | tomato, pepper and rice

Jollof is a West African rice cooked in a thick red sauce of tomato, pepper and onion. The skill is in the sauce: it is fried down until it thickens and the oil separates, which is where the flavour is. Parboiled (easy-cook) rice is traditional because it stays separate in a lot of sauce.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	easy-cook (parboiled) long-grain rice
1	red pepper, deseeded and roughly chopped
1	onion, half roughly chopped and half sliced
400 g	tin chopped tomatoes
1 tbsp	tomato purée
1	slice of scotch bonnet or 1 mild red chilli (optional)
2 tbsp	vegetable or rapeseed oil
1 tsp	curry powder
1 tsp	dried thyme
1	bay leaf
175 ml	hot reduced-salt stock

1. Blend the red pepper, the chopped half of the onion, the tomatoes and the chilli (if using) until smooth.
2. Heat the oil in a wide, heavy pan with a lid. Fry the sliced onion for 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato purée and curry powder and cook for 2 minutes.
3. Add the blended sauce, thyme and bay leaf. Simmer, uncovered, for **20 minutes**, stirring often, until the sauce has thickened to about 250 ml and a layer of red oil has separated. Don't skip this: the colour and sweetness come from it.
4. Rinse the rice until the water is clear, and stir it into the sauce with the hot stock and a pinch of salt. Bring to the boil.

5. Cover with foil, press it down round the edge, and add the lid. Cook on the **lowest heat for 25 to 30 minutes**, without stirring.
6. Turn off the heat and rest for 10 minutes. Remove the bay leaf and chilli, then fluff the rice to mix in the sauce.

> **THE CHILLI**
>
> Scotch bonnet is traditional but very hot. Add a thin slice, or put in a whole chilli and take it out before it bursts, so you control the heat.

LEVEL 2 · PARTY JOLLOF

Party jollof (smoky)

1 hour | 2 portions | the base lightly toasted

At parties jollof is often cooked on a wood fire, so the bottom layer catches and gives a smoky taste. At home, you can get close with smoked paprika and a controlled catch at the end.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	easy-cook (parboiled) long-grain rice
1	red pepper, deseeded and roughly chopped
1	onion, half roughly chopped and half sliced
400 g	tin chopped tomatoes
1 tbsp	tomato purée
1	slice of scotch bonnet or 1 mild red chilli (optional)
2 tbsp	vegetable or rapeseed oil
1 tsp	curry powder
1 tsp	dried thyme
1	bay leaf
175 ml	hot reduced-salt stock
½ tsp	smoked paprika
1 tsp	butter

1. Make the basic jollof as in the previous recipe, adding the smoked paprika with the curry powder and the butter with the stock.
2. When the 25 to 30 minutes of steaming are up, remove the foil and lid and turn the heat to **medium** for **2 to 3 minutes**, without stirring, until you can smell a light toasty, smoky scent from the bottom.
3. Take it off the heat at once, cover and rest for 10 minutes. Scrape up the toasted bits and mix them through. Stop if it smells burnt.

LEVEL 3 · COMPLETE MEAL

Jollof with chicken and plantain

1 hour 15 minutes | 2 portions | baked, not fried

Jollof is usually served with chicken and sweet fried plantain. Baking both keeps it lighter and lets the oven do the work while the rice steams.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	easy-cook rice and the jollof sauce from the basic recipe (all the ingredients above)
250 g	chicken thighs, skin on
1 tsp	curry powder
1 tsp	oil
1	ripe (yellow-black) plantain, peeled and sliced on the diagonal
1 tsp	oil, for the plantain

1. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7). Rub the chicken with the curry powder, oil and salt, and put it on a baking tray. Bake for **35 to 40 minutes** until golden, with juices running clear and no pink at the bone.
2. Make the basic jollof while the chicken cooks.
3. Toss the plantain slices with the oil on a second tray and bake for **15 to 20 minutes**, turning once, until soft and caramelised at the edges.
4. Serve the jollof with the chicken and plantain on the side.

LEVEL 2 · VEGETABLE

Vegetable jollof

1 hour | 2 portions | vegetarian

The vegetables steam on top of the rice, so they stay bright.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	easy-cook rice and the jollof sauce from the basic recipe (all the ingredients above)
1	carrot, finely diced
60 g	green beans, cut into 1 cm pieces
60 g	frozen peas

1. Make the basic jollof, using vegetable stock.
2. After the rice has cooked for 15 minutes, quickly lift the foil, scatter the carrot and green beans on top and re-cover. After a further 8 minutes, add the peas on top. Finish the cooking time.
3. Rest for 10 minutes and gently fold the vegetables through.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cook the sauce down or not

See why the 20 minutes is worth it.

1. Make two small jollofs. In one, simmer the sauce for 20 minutes until the oil separates. In the other, simmer for only 5 minutes.
2. Cook both with the same rice, stock and time, and taste.

Look for: The short-cooked sauce is sharper, thinner and more raw. The long-cooked one is sweeter, darker, and more savoury.

EXPERIMENT

Foil seal or not

Does the steam matter?

1. Cook two small batches of jollof. Seal one with foil under the lid, and just cover the other with the lid.
2. Check how much sauce remains at the end, and the rice texture.

Look for: Without the foil the liquid steams off and the top stays hard. With it, the rice is evenly cooked.

EXPERIMENT

Parboiled or ordinary long-grain

Does the rice type change the cooking?

1. Make two small jollofs, one with easy-cook rice and one with ordinary long-grain rice. Use the same sauce, but only 120 ml of stock for the ordinary rice, and check it after 15 minutes.
2. Compare the grains.

Look for: Ordinary long-grain cooks sooner and can turn soft and sticky, parboiled rice stays firm and separate. Which would you cook for a crowd?

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Basic jollof				
Party jollof				
Jollof with chicken and plantain				
Vegetable jollof				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Sauce 5 vs 20 minutes				
Foil vs no foil				
Parboiled vs ordinary rice				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Rice sticky and mushy	Too much liquid, stirred, or sauce too thin	Cook the sauce down first; measure the stock; don't stir
Rice hard in the middle	Too little liquid, or lid leaked	Add 3 tablespoons of hot water, re-seal and cook 5 more minutes
Sauce tastes sharp or raw	Not fried down enough	Simmer the sauce until the oil separates
Burnt bottom (not smoky)	Heat too high	Lowest heat; check the base is not scorched before the end
Pale	Not enough tomato purée or cooking down	Use the purée and the full simmer
Too hot	Too much chilli	Use a thin slice, or remove the whole chilli early

FOOD SAFETY: JOLLOF

Jollof is cooked rice, so cool leftovers quickly, refrigerate within 1 hour, eat within 24 hours, and reheat once until steaming hot. Bake the chicken until the juices run clear with no pink at the bone. Take care with hot chilli: wash your hands before touching your eyes.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can make a tomato and pepper base and cook it down properly.

☐ I know why the rice is sealed and left unstirred.

☐ I can tell when jollof is cooked and when it is catching.

☐ I know the difference between parboiled and ordinary rice.

☐ I can bake chicken and plantain to go with it.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Rice 2, chapter 7 is Rice with Beans and Lentils: rice and peas, mujaddara, Mexican red rice and Cuban black beans.

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 7 · Rice with Beans and Lentils

SKILL GOAL

Cook rice and beans or lentils together, and know when to cook them separately.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Rice and beans (or lentils) is one of the great food partnerships. Together, the two supply all the protein building blocks your body needs, they are cheap, filling and high in fibre, and they appear in nearly every cuisine. Many of these dishes are healthy by default.

DISH	WHERE FROM	HOW THE RICE AND BEANS MEET
Rice and peas	Jamaica	Rice cooked in the same pot as the beans and coconut milk
Mujaddara	Middle East	Lentils and rice cooked together, topped with browned onions
Red rice	Mexico	Rice toasted in oil, then cooked in tomato; served with beans
Black beans and rice	Cuba	Beans simmered separately, served over plain rice

Two ways to combine them: cook the rice **in the beans' liquid** (rice and peas, mujaddara), so it takes on all their flavour, or cook them **separately** and serve together (black beans and rice), so each keeps its own texture.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Rice and peas

45 minutes | 2 portions | the Caribbean Sunday classic

In Jamaica "peas" means beans, usually red kidney beans. They cook in coconut milk with thyme and spring onion, then the rice is added to the same pot and absorbs everything.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	long-grain white rice
400 g	tin red kidney beans, drained and rinsed
200 ml	light coconut milk
130 ml	water
2	spring onions, bruised with the flat of a knife
2	thyme sprigs
1	garlic clove, crushed
¼ tsp	ground allspice
1	whole scotch bonnet or mild chilli (optional, do not burst)
½ tsp	salt

1. Put the beans, coconut milk, water, spring onions, thyme, garlic, allspice, chilli and salt in a medium pan with a lid. Bring to a simmer and cook for **5 minutes**.
2. Rinse the rice and stir it in. Bring back to the boil, stir once, then cover and cook on the **lowest heat for 20 minutes**, without lifting the lid.
3. Turn off the heat and rest, covered, for **10 minutes**. Remove the thyme stalks, spring onions and chilli, and fluff with a fork.

TINNED BEANS ONLY

Tinned beans are already cooked and safe. Dried red kidney beans are not safe to cook this way (see the box at the end of the chapter).

LEVEL 2 · SIMPLE AND SATISFYING

Mujaddara (lentils, rice and crisp onions)

1 hour | 2 portions | cheap and filling

A Middle Eastern dish of lentils and rice, crowned with deeply browned onions. The onions are the star and take patience.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

100 g	green or brown lentils
100 g	long-grain rice
450 ml	water
1 tsp	ground cumin
½ tsp	salt
2	large onions (about 300 g), thinly sliced
2 tbsp	oil
3 tbsp	natural yoghurt, to serve

1. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over a medium-low heat. Cook the onions with a pinch of salt for **25 to 30 minutes**, stirring regularly, until deep brown and crisp at the edges. Don't rush them.
2. While they cook, put the lentils, cumin and water in a pan, bring to the boil, then simmer, covered, for **15 minutes**.
3. Add the rinsed rice and salt, stir once, cover and cook on the lowest heat for **15 minutes**. Rest, covered, for 10 minutes.
4. Fluff, pile on a plate, and top with the browned onions and the yoghurt. If the pan looks dry before the rice is tender, add 3 tablespoons of hot water.

LEVEL 2 · TOASTED

Mexican-style red rice

40 minutes | 2 portions | a side for beans and chilli

The rice is browned in oil before the tomato goes in, which keeps it separate and gives it a nutty depth.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	long-grain white rice
1 tbsp	oil
½	small onion, finely chopped
1	garlic clove, crushed
½ tsp	ground cumin
200 ml	tomato passata
150 ml	hot reduced-salt stock
80 g	frozen peas and diced carrot

1. Rinse the rice and drain it very well. Heat the oil in a pan with a lid and add the rice. Stir for **4 to 5 minutes** until pale golden.
2. Add the onion, garlic and cumin and stir for 2 minutes.
3. Pour in the passata and hot stock, add the vegetables and a pinch of salt, and stir once. Bring to the boil, cover, and cook on the lowest heat for **15 minutes**.
4. Rest, covered, for 10 minutes and fluff.

LEVEL 3 · SLOW-COOKED FLAVOUR

Cuban-style black beans and rice

50 minutes | 2 portions | beans simmered with a sofrito

Beans get their flavour from a base of onion, pepper and garlic, simmered until some of the beans break down and thicken the liquid. Serve them over plain rice.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	tin black beans (400 g), with their liquid
1 tsp	oil
1	small onion, finely chopped
½	green pepper, finely chopped
2	garlic cloves, crushed
1 tsp	ground cumin
½ tsp	dried oregano
1	bay leaf
100 ml	water
1 tbsp	red wine vinegar or lime juice
150 g	long-grain white rice, boiled as in Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 2

1. Heat the oil and fry the onion and pepper for **8 minutes**. Add the garlic, cumin and oregano for 1 minute.
2. Add the beans with their liquid, the bay leaf and the water. Simmer, uncovered, for **20 minutes**, mashing about a quarter of the beans against the side of the pan to thicken.
3. Stir in the vinegar or lime juice, remove the bay leaf and taste for salt.
4. Serve over the boiled rice.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Tinned or dried beans

Is cooking dried beans worth the effort?

1. Soak 100 g of dried black beans in plenty of cold water overnight. Drain, cover with fresh water and simmer for 60 to 90 minutes until completely soft.
2. Make the Cuban black beans twice, once with the cooked dried beans (with 200 ml of their cooking liquid) and once with a tin.
3. Compare the taste, texture and cost.

Look for: Home-cooked beans are firmer, taste better and are cheaper per portion, but they take time. Tins are fine for most weeknights. Do this with black beans only.

EXPERIMENT

Together or separately

Does the rice need to cook in the beans?

1. Make rice and peas as in the recipe. Then make a second batch where you cook the rice plainly in water, and warm the beans and coconut milk separately before mixing.
2. Compare the flavour of the rice.

Look for: In the first batch the rice tastes of coconut, thyme and allspice all the way through. In the second the flavour sits on the surface.

EXPERIMENT

Browned or just fried onions

How much do the onions matter in mujaddara?

1. Cook one batch of onions for 8 minutes until soft and pale. Cook another for 30 minutes until deep brown.
2. Taste each on the finished mujaddara.

Look for: The pale onions are sweet and soft, the deeply browned ones are crisp, bitter-sweet and smoky. Most people find the long cook transforms the dish.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Rice and peas				
Mujaddara				
Mexican red rice				
Cuban black beans and rice				
Tinned vs dried beans				
Together vs separate				
Pale vs browned onions				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Rice crunchy	Too little liquid or the lid lifted	Add 3 tablespoons of hot water, cover and cook 5 more minutes
Rice mushy	Too much liquid, or stirred	Measure; stir once at most
Beans stay hard (dried)	Old beans or not simmered long enough	Keep simmering; add salt only at the end
Onions burn rather than brown	Heat too high	Medium-low heat, stir often, add a splash of water if sticking
Bland	Not enough seasoning	Finish with lime juice or vinegar and taste for salt
Too hot	Burst chilli	Remove the chilli whole; don't cut it

FOOD SAFETY: KIDNEY BEANS AND COOKED RICE

Dried red kidney beans contain a natural toxin (phytohaemagglutinin) that makes people ill unless the beans are soaked for at least 5 hours and then **boiled hard for at least 10 minutes**. A slow cooker

doesn't get hot enough. Tinned beans are already safe. Cooked rice and bean dishes follow the usual rule: cool within 1 hour, refrigerate, eat within 24 hours, reheat once until steaming hot.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can cook rice in the liquid from beans or lentils.
- ☐ I can brown onions slowly for mujaddara.
- ☐ I can toast rice before adding tomato.
- ☐ I know the safe way to cook dried kidney beans.
- ☐ I can combine rice and beans for a cheap, healthy meal.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Rice 2, chapter 8 is Stuffed, Wrapped and Shaped Rice: stuffed peppers, cabbage or vine-leaf rolls, baked arancini and rice patties.

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 8 · Stuffed, Wrapped and Shaped Rice

SKILL GOAL

Use rice as a filling or a binder in stuffed, rolled and shaped dishes.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Rice can be more than a bed under a stew. Cooked rice makes a filling for vegetables and leaves, a binder for patties, and the centre of an arancino. Each of these is a way to turn a handful of leftovers into a meal.

DISH	RICE USED	HELD TOGETHER BY
Stuffed peppers	Cooked rice mixed with a cooked filling	The pepper itself
Cabbage or vine-leaf rolls	Cooked rice (or raw, in the traditional version)	The leaf, packed tight in a pan
Arancini	Cold risotto	Egg, cheese and a breadcrumb coat
Rice patties	Cold cooked rice	Egg and flour

Cold, day-old rice is firmer and holds a shape much better than fresh rice, which is why leftovers work so well here. The same safety rules apply: use rice that was cooled quickly and kept in the fridge for no more than 24 hours.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Stuffed peppers

1 hour | 2 portions (4 halves) | an easy start

A pepper is a ready-made bowl. The filling is a savoury rice and mince mixture, finished with a little cheese.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	large peppers (any colour), halved lengthways and deseeded
120 g	cooked rice, cooled and from the fridge (about 45 g dry)
1 tsp	oil
½	onion, finely chopped
1	garlic clove, crushed
120 g	lean beef or lamb mince (or 100 g cooked lentils for a vegetarian version)
150 ml	tomato passata
1 tsp	dried oregano or mixed herbs
30 g	feta or mozzarella, crumbled

1. Heat the oven to 180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6). Put the pepper halves cut side up in a baking dish and roast for **10 minutes**.
2. Heat the oil and fry the onion for 5 minutes. Add the garlic and the mince (or lentils) and cook for **6 to 8 minutes**, until the mince is browned all through with no pink.
3. Stir in the passata, herbs and a pinch of salt. Simmer for 5 minutes, then mix with the rice.
4. Spoon the filling into the peppers, scatter the cheese on top and pour 4 tablespoons of water into the dish. Cover with foil and bake for **20 minutes**, then uncover and bake for **10 minutes** more, until the peppers are soft and the filling is steaming hot.

LEVEL 2 · ROLLING

Cabbage or vine-leaf rolls

1 hour | 2 portions (8 rolls) | vegetarian

Wrapping a rice filling in leaves is a tradition from Greece and Turkey to Eastern Europe. Cabbage leaves are easier to find than vine leaves.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

8	large savoy cabbage leaves (or 12 jarred vine leaves, rinsed)
100 g	cooked rice, cooled
½	small onion, finely chopped
1 tbsp	chopped mint and parsley
1 tbsp	raisins or chopped dried apricots
1 tbsp	toasted pine nuts or flaked almonds
1	lemon, juice only
1 tsp	olive oil
150 ml	hot vegetable stock

1. Cut out the thick rib from the base of each cabbage leaf. Boil the leaves for **3 minutes** until pliable, drain and pat dry. (Vine leaves from a jar only need rinsing.)
2. Mix the rice, onion, herbs, fruit, nuts, half the lemon juice and the oil.
3. Put about 2 tablespoons of filling near the base of each leaf. Fold in the sides and roll up tightly like a small parcel.
4. Pack the rolls seam side down in a snug pan. Pour over the stock and the rest of the lemon juice, put a small plate on top to keep them in place, cover and simmer on a low heat for **30 minutes**.
5. Serve warm or at room temperature with yoghurt.

LEVEL 2 · TREAT

Baked arancini

45 minutes | 2 portions (6 balls) | oven-baked, not fried

Arancini are balls of cold risotto, with a piece of melting cheese in the middle, coated in breadcrumbs. They taste best when the risotto is cold and firm, which makes this a good use for leftovers from Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 7.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

250 g	cold leftover risotto, from the fridge (less than 24 hours old)
1	medium egg, beaten (half in the rice, half for coating)
20 g	parmesan, finely grated
30 g	mozzarella, cut into 6 small cubes
2 tbsp	plain flour
4 tbsp	dried breadcrumbs
1 tsp	oil, for brushing

1. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7) and line a baking tray with baking paper.
2. Mix the cold risotto with half the beaten egg and the parmesan. Divide into 6.
3. Flatten each portion in your palm, put a cube of mozzarella in the middle and close the rice round it into a ball.
4. Roll each ball in flour, then the remaining egg, then breadcrumbs. Place on the tray, brush lightly with oil.
5. Bake for **20 to 25 minutes**, turning once, until golden and crisp. Cut one open: the middle must be steaming hot and the mozzarella melted.

> **THE FRIED VERSION (A TREAT)**
>
> To deep-fry, heat about 5 cm of oil in a deep pan to **170 to 180°C** (use a thermometer), fry 2 or 3 balls at a time for 3 to 4 minutes until deep golden, and drain on kitchen paper. Never leave hot oil unattended, never fill the pan more than a third, and keep the pan lid close by.

LEVEL 3 · USE IT UP

Rice patties from leftovers

25 minutes | 2 portions (6 patties) | a use for leftover rice

The beaten egg and a little flour bind cold rice into patties that fry crisp outside and soft inside. Good with a salad or a fried egg.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

200 g	cold cooked rice, from the fridge (less than 24 hours old)
1	medium egg
2	spring onions, finely sliced
50 g	courgette, grated and squeezed dry
30 g	cheddar or parmesan, grated
3 tbsp	plain flour or breadcrumbs
1 tbsp	chopped herbs
2 tsp	oil, for frying
3 tbsp	natural yoghurt, to serve

1. Mix everything except the oil and yoghurt in a bowl, pressing the rice together with a fork. It should hold when squeezed. Add a little more flour if it is too wet.
2. Shape into 6 patties about 1.5 cm thick with wet hands.
3. Heat the oil in a non-stick frying pan over a medium heat. Fry the patties for **3 to 4 minutes on each side**, until golden and hot through the middle.
4. Serve with the yoghurt.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Raw or cooked rice in the filling

How do the traditional versions work?

1. Fill a pepper half with the same filling, but swap the cooked rice for 20 g of raw rice and add 80 ml of extra stock to the dish.
2. Cover tightly and bake for 50 to 60 minutes, until the rice is tender. Compare with the cooked-rice version.

Look for: Raw rice cooks in the filling's juices and tastes of them, but it takes much longer and needs enough liquid. Cooked rice is quicker and more predictable.

EXPERIMENT

Baked or fried arancini

Is frying worth it?

1. Make six arancini. Bake three. Fry three carefully, as in the tip box.
2. Compare the crispness, greasiness and flavour.

Look for: Fried arancini are crisper and richer, baked ones are lighter and easier. Is the difference big enough to justify the oil?

EXPERIMENT

How much binder

What holds a patty together?

1. Make three small batches of patties: one with the egg and flour, one with only the egg, and one with neither.
2. Fry them the same way and see which hold together.

Look for: Without egg the patties crumble, without flour they are softer. The egg does most of the work.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Stuffed peppers				
Cabbage or vine-leaf rolls				
Baked arancini				
Rice patties				
Raw vs cooked rice filling				
Baked vs fried arancini				
Binder amounts				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Peppers collapse	Roasted too long first	Roast for 10 minutes only, and use sturdy peppers
Filling is dry	No sauce in the mix	Add more passata or a splash of stock
Rolls fall apart	Rolled loosely or not packed tight	Roll firmly; pack them snugly with the seam down
Arancini burst	Rice too warm, or cheese poking out	Use cold rice and seal the cheese fully
Patties crumble	Too little binder, or flipped too soon	Add egg or flour; fry until set before turning
Raw rice filling still hard	Not enough liquid or time	Add stock, re-cover and bake longer

FOOD SAFETY: STUFFED AND SHAPED RICE

Rice that was left out is not safe to shape or stuff: use rice cooled within the hour and kept in the fridge for less than 24 hours. Cook mince until browned all through with no pink. Arancini and patties

must be steaming hot in the middle. Deep-frying is a burn and fire risk, so take care.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can stuff and bake peppers.
- ☐ I can roll leaves around a filling.
- ☐ I can shape and coat arancini, baked or fried.
- ☐ I can turn leftover rice into patties.
- ☐ I know how old leftover rice may be and why.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Rice 2, chapter 9 is Putting It Together: a four-dish world rice supper for guests, with a timetable.

Cooking Skills: Rice 2

Chapter 9 · Putting It Together

SKILL GOAL

Plan, scale and time a multi-dish rice supper for guests, working backwards from serving time.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Cooking a single dish is a skill; cooking several for a table, all ready at about the same time, is another. This chapter is about planning. You will work backwards from the time you want to eat, choose dishes that don't all need the hob at once, do the cold things in advance, and give each rice dish its resting time.

RULE	WHY
Work backwards from serving time	Rice needs rests built in, so plan them as steps
Choose different cooking methods	One sealed pot, one assembled by hand, one made ahead
Do the cold dishes first	Raita, salads and marinades improve and need no attention
Never hold rice warm for more than an hour	Serve it, or cool and refrigerate it (the cooked-rice rules from Rice 1)
Ask about allergies and diets	Shellfish, nuts, dairy and raw fish are common concerns for guests
Don't serve raw fish to vulnerable guests	Pregnant women, children under 5, people aged 65 and over, and anyone with a weakened immune system

Try it

The menu is a four-dish supper for four, using recipes from this course: **hand rolls** to start, **chicken biryani** with **raita and tomato salad** as the main course, and **coconut rice with mango** to finish.

COURSE 1 · STARTER

Hand rolls for four

20 minutes at the table | 4 portions (8 cones) | everyone rolls their own

A starter that cooks nothing at the last minute and keeps everyone busy. The rice is made ahead, seasoned and kept covered (see the timetable below).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

130 g	short-grain sushi rice, cooked and seasoned as in chapter 1, with the dressing made from 2 tbsp rice vinegar, 2 tsp sugar and ½ tsp salt
4	nori sheets, each cut in half
10 cm	cucumber, cut into thin sticks
1	ripe avocado, sliced
120 g	hot-smoked salmon, in strips
4 tbsp	reduced-salt soy sauce, for dipping
1 tbsp	wasabi and pickled ginger

1. Lay out the rice, nori, fillings, soy sauce, wasabi and ginger in bowls on the table.
2. Show your guests how to spread about 40 g of rice on a half-sheet of nori, add fillings, and roll into a cone (chapter 2).
3. Eat at once. Throw away any sushi rice left after **1 hour** at room temperature.

COURSE 2 · MAIN

Chicken biryani for four

1 hour 30 minutes, plus marinating | 4 portions | one big sealed pot

The recipe from chapter 5, doubled. Use a very wide heavy casserole (26 to 28 cm) with a tight lid so the rice stays in a layer no more than 5 cm deep.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

300 g	basmati rice
500 g	boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 3 cm pieces
200 g	natural yoghurt
2 tsp	garam masala
1 tsp	ground turmeric
1 tsp	chilli powder or paprika
2 tsp	grated fresh ginger
4	garlic cloves, crushed
1	lemon, juiced
1 tsp	salt
2 tbsp	oil
2	large onions, thinly sliced
2.5 litres	water, with 2 tsp salt, 6 cardamom pods, 2 bay leaves and 1 cinnamon stick, for par-boiling
4 tbsp	chopped coriander
4 tbsp	chopped mint
6 tbsp	warm milk with a pinch of saffron (or ½ tsp turmeric)

1. Marinate the chicken with the yoghurt, spices, ginger, garlic, lemon and salt in the fridge for at least 1 hour, up to 24 hours.
2. Rinse and soak the rice for 20 minutes. Fry the onions in the oil for 12 to 15 minutes until golden, taking out a third for the top. Add the chicken and marinade and cook,

covered, for **15 minutes**, until nearly cooked through.

3. Boil the rice in the spiced, salted water for **5 minutes** and drain. Layer it over the chicken, then the onions, herbs and saffron milk.
4. Seal with foil and the lid and cook on the lowest heat for **30 minutes**. Rest for 5 minutes. Check the thickest piece of chicken is cooked through and white all over before serving.

COURSE 2 · SIDE

Raita and tomato salad

15 minutes | 4 portions | make in the morning

Cool, fresh dishes to balance a hot biryani. Both keep well in the fridge for a few hours.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

300 g	natural yoghurt
10 cm	cucumber, grated and squeezed dry
2 tbsp	chopped mint
½ tsp	ground cumin
4	ripe tomatoes, chopped
½	red onion, thinly sliced
½	lemon, juiced

1. Make the raita as in chapter 5 with the yoghurt, cucumber, mint and cumin; chill.
2. Toss the tomatoes, onion and lemon juice with a pinch of salt in a bowl; chill.

COURSE 3 · PUDDING

Coconut rice with mango for four

35 minutes · 4 portions · light and sweet

The sweet coconut rice from Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 8, scaled up.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

240 g	jasmine rice
480 ml	light coconut milk
240 ml	water
2 tsp	sugar
¼ tsp	salt
2	ripe mangoes, sliced
2	limes, cut into wedges

1. Rinse and drain the rice. Put it with the coconut milk, water, sugar and salt in a medium pan with a tight lid.
2. Bring to the boil, stir once, cover and cook on the lowest heat for **15 minutes**. Rest for 10 minutes with the lid on.
3. Serve warm with the mango and a squeeze of lime.

The timetable

These times assume dinner at about 8 pm, and every one is adjustable. The aim is to see how the dishes fit together.

TIME	WHAT TO DO
Morning	Marinate the chicken. Make the raita and tomato salad and chill them.
5:45 pm	Rinse the sushi rice and soak for 30 minutes.
6:15 pm	Cook the sushi rice (12 minutes), then rest for 10 minutes.

TIME	WHAT TO DO
6:40 pm	Season the rice with the vinegar dressing, fan it, and cover with a damp tea towel. It must be used by 7:40 pm.
6:45 pm	Cut the cucumber, avocado and salmon and lay out the nori, soy sauce, wasabi and ginger.
6:55 pm	Rinse and soak the basmati for 20 minutes.
7:00 pm	Start the biryani: fry the onions (12 to 15 minutes), then add the chicken and cook for 15 minutes.
7:20 pm	Par-boil the basmati (5 minutes), drain, layer, seal and cook on the lowest heat for 30 minutes.
7:25 pm	Put the sushi on the table and serve the hand rolls as a starter, while the biryani steams.
7:50 pm	Turn off the biryani and let it rest for 5 minutes. Start the coconut rice (15 minutes plus 10 resting).
8:00 pm	Serve the biryani with the raita and tomato salad.
8:25 pm	Serve the coconut rice and mango.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Timing the dishes

Do a trial run before the guests arrive.

1. Cook a one-person version of the supper (a quarter of each recipe) following the timetable.
2. Write down the times that were wrong, and what you forgot to do.
3. Adjust the timetable before you cook for real.

Look for: Which steps took longer than you expected? The usual culprits are soaking, chopping and washing up.

EXPERIMENT

Fresh or reheated biryani

Is biryani made ahead any good?

1. Make a half-quantity of chicken biryani. Serve half at once.
2. Cool the rest quickly, refrigerate within the hour, and reheat the next day with a splash of water, covered, until steaming hot all through.

Look for: Reheated biryani is slightly drier, but the flavours are often stronger. Eat reheated rice only once, and don't reheat it again.

EXPERIMENT

Your own fusion bowl

Combine two traditions.

1. Choose a rice from one chapter and a topping, spice or sauce from another (for example, jollof rice with a fried egg, or sushi rice with a tomato-and-pepper sauce).
2. Make it, taste it, and change one thing.
3. Write the final version into your house recipes.

Look for: Which combinations surprise you? A good fusion keeps one idea from each tradition and not everything.

Your skills

SKILL	CHAPTER	I CAN DO IT
Cook and season sushi rice, and shape onigiri	1	☐
Roll hand rolls and maki, and make chirashi	2	☐
Make congee at the thickness I like	3	☐
Make a paella with a crust	4	☐
Par-boil and layer a biryani	5	☐

SKILL	CHAPTER	I CAN DO IT
Make jollof with a thick, cooked-down base	6	☐
Cook rice with beans or lentils	7	☐
Stuff, roll and shape rice	8	☐
Plan a multi-dish meal around rice	9	☐

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Hand rolls for four				
Chicken biryani for four				
Raita and tomato salad				
Coconut rice with mango				
Trial run				
Fresh vs reheated biryani				
My fusion bowl				

My house recipes

MY HOUSE RECIPE	RICE AND METHOD	FLAVOURS AND EXTRAS	HOW LONG	NOTES
My sushi or rice-ball filling				
My one-pot rice				
My rice and beans				
My leftover rice dish				

MY HOUSE RECIPE	RICE AND METHOD	FLAVOURS AND EXTRAS	HOW LONG	NOTES
My supper for guests				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Everything is ready at the wrong time	No timetable	Work backwards from serving; add the rests as steps
Sushi rice goes hard	Chilled or left too long	Make it last, and use it within the hour
Biryani is dry	Seal leaked or par-boil too short	Seal with foil; add a splash of hot water before the rest
Hob is too busy	Too many pan dishes	Choose a cold starter and a make-ahead side
Not enough food	Recipes were for 2	Scale and use a larger pan, not a thicker rice layer
Leftovers pile up	Rice left out while eating	Pack leftover rice into the fridge within an hour

FOOD SAFETY: COOKING FOR GUESTS

Serve rice dishes within an hour of cooking, and refrigerate leftovers within an hour of serving, not the next morning. Keep cold dishes cold until serving. Check chicken is cooked through. Keep raw fish, if you use it, in the fridge until the last minute, and don't serve it to the vulnerable groups listed above.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can plan a multi-dish meal backwards from the serving time.
- ☐ I can scale a recipe up for four without ruining it.
- ☐ I can combine hot, cold and make-ahead dishes.
- ☐ I have a note of my own fusion ideas.
- ☐ I have written down my house recipes.

NEXT CHAPTER

That's the end of Cooking Skills: Rice 2. Rice 1 and Rice 2 together cover the methods and the dishes. The next course in the series is up to you.