

RECIPES

Mexican Rice- Arroz Mexicana

This is one of the world's greatest rice dishes that is no less special and savory than a vegetarian paella! But only when it is prepared properly, which, in this country, is seldom. What makes it so delicious is that, like all pilaf-style rice, it is first fried in a little oil, which keeps it from sticking together and gives it a toasty flavor and texture. (You can ignore the usual advice to wash the rice. If you use good quality long-grain rice, such as jasmine, the frying eliminates any starchiness). The rice is then fried with crushed tomatoes until the liquid has evaporated and the rice no longer sticks together; this cooks the flavor into the rice without making it gloppy. The rice is then simmered in a savory broth with onions and mild poblano chiles, which instills yet more layers of flavor. Because in large quantities the process is time consuming, many restaurants take shortcuts that often include not frying the tomato sauce into the rice grains, and sometimes omitting the initial frying that toasts the rice to just the right texture. But those omissions are unnecessary at home, where the dish is both quick and easy to prepare. The recipe produces a side dish that stands on its own!



Mexican Rice- Arroz Mexicana

Ingredients

4 cloves garlic, chopped
1 teaspoon salt
2 1/3 cups low sodium chicken broth
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 1/2 cups long grain rice, preferably jasmine
1/3 cup canned, fire-roasted crushed tomatoes
1/3 cup peeled and grated carrot
1 cup white onion sliced to 1/4 inch thick
1 cup poblano chile, seeds removed and sliced to 1/4 inch thick
1/4 cup frozen peas

Directions

1. Prepare the broth. Put the garlic and salt in a blender, add 1 cup of the broth and puree. Add the rest of the broth, blend again to mix thoroughly, and reserve.

2. Fry the rice. Heat a large pot (I like to use a cast-iron Dutch oven) over medium heat, add the olive oil and then stir in the rice. Cook the rice, stirring frequently, until it becomes golden brown. If necessary, turn the heat down to keep it from scorching. When it is done, in about 5 – 8 minutes, you will hear a sound like sand being tossed in a metal container.

3. Cook the sauce into the rice. Stir the crushed tomato into the browned rice, turn the heat to medium or just a bit over and cook, stirring almost constantly, until nearly all the liquid has evaporated and the rice grains no longer stick together, about 5 minutes. This is very important, as the more liquid that has evaporated the lighter the rice will be. At first you will think it's never going to happen but it will. Toward the end, some of the rice may begin to scorch. A little of that adds to the flavor, but turn down the heat to minimize it.

4. Cook the rice. Blend the broth mixture briefly to ensure it is well mixed, and pour it into the pot with the rice. Turn the heat to high, add the carrots, sliced onion, poblano, and frozen peas. Bring the broth to a full boil, cover the pot, turn the heat to very low (as low as will allow the broth to continue simmering) and cook for 15 minutes.

5. Finish the rice. Remove the rice from the heat and let it steam for 10 minutes. Open the pot and gently stir the rice with a fork to separate the grains of rice. Cover the pot and allow it to steam for 10 more minutes. Serves 8.