

Basic Baked Brown Rice

A lot of people think they don't like brown rice because they have only eaten badly cooked or undercooked brown rice. There is no good reason for this. If you are not familiar with cooking brown rice, try my directions below. The common cooking directions involve simmering the rice and water on the stovetop for about 45 minutes. My directions call for starting it on the stove top, then sticking it in the oven and forgetting about it until the timer rings an hour later. With the baking method I can forget the rice while it cooks and avoid being at the mercy of capricious burners. Whatever cooking options you choose, the final texture of the rice should be tender and moist. (The reheating tip after the recipe is invaluable, both to produce hot tender brown rice in 15 minutes and rescue imperfectly-cooked rice.)

(Makes 5–6 cups cooked brown rice)

4 cups water (see note)
1 teaspoon salt
2 cups brown basmati rice

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

3. Bring water to a boil in an ovenproof 2½-quart pot with a lid. Stir in salt and rice and bring back to a boil. Check for any husks that may have floated to the surface. (Some of us are phobic about getting a husk in a mouthful of rice.) Cover and place in oven for 1 hour.
4. Remove from the oven and leave pot covered for 10 minutes. Take off lid and fluff cooked rice with a fork, loosening it from the sides of the pot at the same time. Cover with a paper towel until cool. (This allows steam to escape without drying the surface of the cooked rice.)
5. Store leftovers in the refrigerator, covered tightly after it has completely cooled. It keeps well for up to a week, but if you don't think you will use it within 3 days, I suggest you freeze it. (See note.)

Note:

► If you choose to rinse the rice before cooking it, rinse it *after* you measure. Drain well to remove excess water. Some people soak rice for 30 minutes before cooking, but it seems to be an unnecessary step.

► Brown rice freezes well. I freeze it in 2-cup plastic storage containers that allow me to transfer the frozen chunk of rice directly into the steamer basket of my 1-quart saucepan for steaming. Otherwise you could place rice in 1-pint plastic bags, removing as much air as possible before sealing the bags.

Reheating leftover or frozen rice

I never cook less than 2 cups of rice, which makes 5–6 cups of cooked rice. This means I often have extra, which I usually pack in 2-cup storage containers and freeze. I sleep a lot better if I know there is leftover rice in the refrigerator or freezer. The best way to reheat cold or frozen brown rice is over steam. It will taste freshly made, and will stay hot over the steam until you are ready to serve. (Let the steam escape so the rice doesn't get soggy, and don't let the pot boil dry!)

1. Place a half-inch of water in a saucepan – the size depends on the amount of rice. (A frozen 2-cup lump of rice fits perfectly in my 1-quart saucepan.)
2. Place a basket steamer in saucepan and spray with non-stick spray or line with a coffee filter. This will make it much easier to both remove the rice and clean the steamer basket.
3. Place the cold or frozen cooked rice in the basket and place the saucepan over a medium high heat. When the water boils, cover and steam for 10–15 minutes, or until rice is hot through. This is usually enough time to heat 2–3 cups of cold or frozen rice.

Which brown rice?

In large stores with bulk grain sections you can find a mind boggling selection of long, short, and medium-grain rice, both domestic and imported, organic and otherwise, and including brown, white, red, black, sticky, sweet, jasmine, and basmati. Brown rice is nutrition-dense, fiber-rich, and fluent in just about any language or culture you choose. It also has twice as much fiber as white rice because it has not been stripped of its bran. (Note: Although brown rice is an intact grain, because of the type and quantity of starch it contains, it may need to be avoided – or at least minimized – by anyone with insulin resistance or diabetes.)

Brown basmati rice has a nutty fragrance and a more delicate texture than regular brown rice, and I tend to buy it and cook it without giving any thought to other varieties. However, even different brands of basmati rice absorb water differently. I stick to one kind (my current favorite is from Trader Joe's) to avoid being surprised with soggy rice one time and too-dry rice another time.

Short grain brown rice is better for recipes where plumper, moister rice is appropriate, like the *Brown Rice Power Patties* on page 225.)

Wild rice, by the way, is the seed of a wild grass and not technically part of the rice family. If you happen to like wild rice (full disclosure: I don't), you might find that its firm texture is more appropriate in a side dish like *Nutty Brown Rice* (this page) or *Quick Brown Rice Pilaf* (next page).

To use brown rice:

Cooked as a breakfast cereal with milk and honey; *Brown Rice Power Patties* (page 225); *Millet (or Brown Rice) Pudding* (page 220); *Brown Rice Salad* (page 226); *Green Eggs and Quinoa* (page 253); *Kedgerie* (page 242); *Mexican Brown Rice* (page 224); *Nutty Brown Rice* (this page); *Quick Brown Rice Pilaf* (next page).

Nutty Brown Rice

A great rice dish – simply made, interesting looking, decadent tasting, and a particularly good last-minute dish if you keep pecans and sesame seeds on hand, as I do. My instant version leaves out the green onions, which are not standard items in my refrigerator. This dish is still very good without them. It works best with leftover rice, by the way.

(Serves 4 – 6)

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 bunch green onions, thinly sliced
- 4 cups *Basic Baked Brown Rice* (previous page)
- 1 scant teaspoon salt
- ½ cup raw or toasted chopped nuts (walnuts, almonds, or pecans)
- ¼ cup raw or toasted sesame seeds (see note)

1. Heat oil over medium heat in large skillet and add pepper flakes. Cook gently in the oil for a couple of minutes, and then add green onions. Sauté for about 20 seconds, so they're softened but still bright green.
2. Add rice, salt, nuts, and seeds. Toss until heated through.

Stovetop toasted sesame seeds

Even though raw is just fine, toasted is even better. (See page 225 for oven toasted.)

1. Spread seeds (I prefer unhulled) in a skillet over medium heat.
2. After about a minute, shake and swirl the pan every 5 seconds or so to help them toast evenly. Toast for about 3 minutes. I find that by the time they *look* toasted, they taste overcooked: watch the timing rather than the color of the seeds. As soon as you hear few of them pop in the pan, take them off the heat. They will continue to cook in the hot pan, so tip them right away into a dish or onto a piece of parchment to cool.