

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.)

Wild rice, by the way, is the seed of a wild grass and not technically part of the rice family. Its firm texture is more appropriate in a side dish like *Nutty Brown Rice* (page 211) or *Quick Brown Rice Pilaf* (page 212).

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 brown 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. (One caveat: short grain brown rice is better for recipes where plumper, moister rice is appropriate, like the *Brown Rice Power Patties* on page 213.)

To use brown rice:

Cooked as a breakfast cereal with milk and honey; *Brown Rice Power Patties* (page 213); *Brown Rice (or Millet) Pudding* (page 215); *Brown Rice Salad* (page 214); *Green Eggs and Rice* (page 244); *Kedgerie* (page 233); *Mexican Brown Rice* (page 212); *Nutty Brown Rice* (page 211); *Quick Brown Rice Pilaf* (page 212).

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 re-heating 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.

1. 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.
2. 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.)
3. 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 Rice (leftover, cold, or frozen)

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.

Nutty Brown Rice

This is a great rice dish – simply-made, interesting-looking, and decadent tasting. It is a particularly good last-minute dish if you keep pecans and sesame seeds on hand in the refrigerator, 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.

(Serves 4 – 6)

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 bunch green onions, thinly sliced
- 4 cups cooked brown rice (previous page)
- 1 scant teaspoon salt
- ½ cup raw or toasted chopped nuts (walnuts, almonds, or pecans)
- ¼ cup sesame seeds, toasted (see box) or raw

1. Heat oil over medium heat in large skillet (preferably a heavy stovetop-to-table sort of pan) and add pepper flakes. Cook gently in the oil for a couple of minutes, and then add green onions. Sauté for about 30 seconds; onions should be barely softened and still bright green.
2. Add rice, salt, nuts, and seeds. Toss until heated through.

Note:

► This recipe works better with day-old rice than fresh. Cooked whole barley (page 207) can be substituted for the rice.

Toasting Sesame Seeds

Spread sesame seeds in a shallow baking pan and toast in a 325-degree oven for 5–10 minutes. Keep an anxious eye on the seeds and shake the pan after a few minutes. They cook quickly and it takes very little time for golden and sweet to become brown and bitter. Remember also that they will continue to cook in the hot pan even after you take them out of the oven.