

RICE IS NICE



For thousands of years, rice has been a staple food source for many Asian countries like China, Japan and India. It's wonderfully versatile and is used as a base for many dishes from curries and stir-fries, to sushi and even puddings! A grain of rice is a seed from a special kind of grass called *oryza sativa*. This grass needs lots of rain as it grows, and then dry conditions before it is harvested. Rice is grown in water-logged fields known as 'rice paddies' across Asia, but also in a few European countries, like Italy and Spain. Once the rice is harvested, the grains are shaken from the grasses, and their rough brown husks removed.

A grain of rice is made up of three parts: the endosperm, which is full of starchy carbohydrates that make up the majority of the grain; the germ, which contains lots of antioxidants; and the outer coating, or bran, which is full of fibre and vitamins (see *All about carbohydrates*).

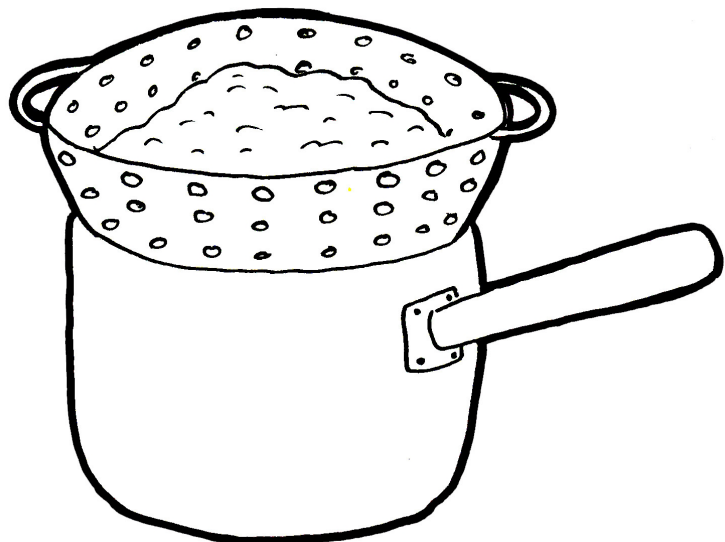
It's worth remembering that any flavouring you boil with rice will infuse it with wonderful fragrances and flavours. For a bit of variety, try boiling things like fresh herbs, a cinnamon stick, a few cardamom pods, a strip of lemon zest or even a green tea bag in the water with the rice.

According to the Rice Association, there are over 40,000 different varieties of cultivated rice. Here are a few of the most popular:

BROWN RICE: After the rough husk is removed, the inner grain of rice is a brown colour. This is called 'brown rice'. Some people prefer to eat brown rice because the bran, or outer coating, is left intact. Because of this, brown rice grains have more nutritional value than white rice. Brown rice takes longer to cook than white rice, has a firmer texture and a slightly nuttier flavour.

WHITE RICE: If you mill brown rice grains, the bran comes away, leaving you with the white inner grain. This is called 'white rice'. White rice is the most common variety of rice. It has a delicate flavour and is quicker to cook than brown rice.

BASMATI RICE: Basmati rice is a thin grain of rice grown in India and Pakistan. It has an aromatic flavour that goes brilliantly with curries. You can get white or brown basmati rice; brown basmati has a higher fibre content and stronger aroma than white basmati.



JASMINE RICE: These long, thin grains of rice originated in Thailand. They have a gentle aromatic flavour and become soft and sticky when they cooked. Jasmine rice is often served with Thai curries.

ARBORIO RICE: This fat, short-grain rice is grown in Northern Italy. It has a high starch content and because of that, gets quite oozy and creamy when cooked. This rice is used for making the classic Italian dish, risotto.

SUSHI RICE: A short-grain Japanese white rice is used for sushi. This rice is quite starchy and has a sticky dense quality when cooked that makes it perfect for rolling and molding into rolls and other shapes.

ALTERNATIVES TO RICE

Bulghar wheat is a grain often used in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. It is a grain like rice, but round, with a firmer texture and nuttier flavour.

Couscous isn't a grain (see *All about bread*), but it is used in a similar way to rice all across North Africa and the Middle East.

FOOD SAFETY

Rice is a starchy food, and the bacteria that cause food poisoning absolutely love it (See *How to handle food safely*). Bacteria feed off the starch and with warmth and time will multiply, so the best way of preventing that from happening is to not leave rice hanging around for too long.

If you are cooking rice, don't cook it too far in advance and keep it warm before you serve it.

If you have leftover rice, always cool it down, then cover it and keep it in the fridge. Use it up within a day.

When reheating rice, make sure it's hot all the way through before you eat it so any lingering bacteria that may have grown on it are killed.