



Spanish Paella

an internationally-known rice dish

Paella History

Moorish Influence

In Moorish Spain, farmers improved the old Roman irrigation systems along the Mediterranean coast. This led to greater yields in rice production. Consequently, residents of the Valencian region often made casseroles of rice, fish and spices for family gatherings and religious feasts, thus establishing the custom of eating rice in Spain. This led to rice becoming a staple by the 15th century. Afterwards, it became customary for cooks to combine rice with vegetables, beans and dry cod, providing an acceptable meal for Lent. Along Spain's eastern coast, rice was predominantly eaten with fish.

Valencian Paella

On special occasions, 18th century Valencians used paelleras to cook rice in the open air of their orchards near lake Albufera. Water vole meat was one of the main ingredients of early

paellas, along with eel and butter beans. Novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez described the Valencian custom of eating water voles in *Cañas y Barro* (1902), a realistic novel about life among the fishermen and peasants near lake Albufera.

Living standards rose with the sociological changes of the late 19th century in Spain, giving rise to gatherings and outings in the countryside. This led to a change in paella's ingredients as well, using instead rabbit, chicken, duck and sometimes snails. This dish became so popular that in 1840 a local Spanish newspaper first used the word paella to refer to the recipe rather than the pan.

The most widely used, complete ingredient list of this era was as follows: short-grain white rice, chicken, rabbit, shrimp, snails (optional), duck (optional), butter beans, great northern beans, runner beans, artichoke (a substitute for runner beans in the winter), tomatoes, fresh rosemary, sweet paprika, saffron,

Paella is currently an internationally-known rice dish from Spain. It originated in the fields of a region called Valencia on the eastern coast of Spain. Today paella is made in every region of Spain, using just about any kind of ingredient that goes well with rice. There are as many versions of paella as there are cooks.

garlic (optional), salt, olive oil and water. (Poorer Valencians, however, sometimes used nothing more than snails for meat.) Valencians insist that only these ingredients should go into making modern Valencian paella.

Seafood & Mixed Paella

On the Mediterranean coast, Valencians used seafood instead of meat and beans to make paella. Valencians regard this recipe as authentic as well. In this recipe, the seafood is served in the shell. A variant on this is paella del senyoret which utilizes seafood without shells. Later, however, Spaniards living outside of Valencia combined seafood with meat from land animals and mixed paella was born. This paella is sometimes called “preparación barroca” (baroque preparation) due to the variety of ingredients and its final presentation. During the 20th century, paella’s popularity spread past Spain’s borders.

As other cultures set out to make paella, the dish invariably acquired regional influences. Consequently, paella recipes went from being relatively simple to including a wide variety of seafood, meat, sausage, (even chorizo) vegetables and many different seasonings. However, the most globally popular recipe is seafood paella.

Throughout non-Valencian Spain, mixed paella is very popular. Some restaurants in Spain (and many in the United States) that serve this mixed version, refer to it as Valencian paella. However, Valencians insist only the original two Valencian recipes are authentic. They generally view all others as inferior, not genuine or even grotesque.



The Basics of Paella

Cook Over a Fire

Paella is best prepared over an open fire, charcoal BBQ or gas paella burner. Use a round kettle-style BBQ, such as a Weber brand. The reason for this is so that the heat is evenly distributed and because the heat should gradually decrease as you are cooking it. First, the fire must be very hot to brown the meat, then it should be lower to simmer the rice.

If you prepare paella often, you may want to invest in a Paella Burner & Adjustable Tripod Stand, designed specifically for cooking paella outside. They usually come with two-ring or three-ring burners and allow adjusting each ring separately. These burners connect to a propane tank via a hose and regulator.

Use a Paella Pan

A traditional paella pan is a necessity. The pan is sometimes called a paellera, although there is some disagreement among Spaniards about the use of this word. It is a large, flat, open round steel pan with handles.

Use Bomba Rice or Medium-Grain Rice

For best results, use the bomba variety of rice, which is an





almost round rice grain from Levante (the eastern coast of Spain). If bomba rice is not available, use a medium-grain rather than a long grain rice. Both bomba or medium-grain rice absorbs a lot of liquid, which makes it particularly suitable for paella. You can order bomba rice from many online Spanish food retailers.

How to Season a Paella Pan

Before cooking in a paella pan, be sure to season the pan. Although there are different ways to do this, the simplest method is to first wash the pan with warm water and soap and dry with a soft cloth immediately. While the pan is still warm, using a soft cloth or paper towel, rub olive oil over the entire inside of the pan. If the pan is not warm after washing, place it in the oven on warm for a few minutes, then rub the oil on it.

It is very important to thoroughly clean the pan immediately after each use. Then, before storing it, rub it with olive oil to prevent it from rusting.

If you ever pull out your pan and it has begun to rust, don't panic and run out to buy a new one! Simply use a soapy steel wool pad to gently wash it and rub off the rust. Then, rub with olive oil to season it again.

Varieties

There are three widely known types of paella: Valencian paella (Spanish: paella valenciana), seafood paella (Spanish: paella de marisco) and mixed paella (Spanish: paella mixta), but there are many others as well.



Paella de Marisco

By *Lisa & Tony Sier*

Seafood Paella is probably the most famous and popular Spanish dish around the world. It originates in Valencia, a region on the Mediterranean coast of Spain, between Barcelona and Murcia that is known for its rice dishes. There are as many versions of paella as there are cooks in Spain! This version has chicken and pork, as well as clams, mussels and shrimp. If you like, leave out the chicken and pork for a purely seafood paella, or paella de marisco.

Prep Time: 45 minutes


Cook Time: 1 hour

Total Time: 1 hour, 45 minutes

Yield: 10 Servings

Ingredients

1 yellow or white onion, diced
2 tomatoes, diced
1 whole chicken or 8 drumsticks or thighs
1 ½ lbs pork loin (fat trimmed), cut into 1-inch cubes
½ lb calamari (squid)
1 - 1 ½ lbs medium grain or “bomba” rice
4-6 cups fish broth (or chicken broth if unavailable)
1 large pinch saffron threads
1 ½ lbs raw mussels in shell (frozen or fresh)
1 lb small clams (frozen or fresh)
1 ½ lbs raw shrimp, medium or large - shell on
1 sweet red bell pepper
1 10 oz. pkg frozen peas
Spanish olive oil, salt to taste





Preparation

A traditional paella pan, a long wooden spoon or paddle, and a barbecue or gas burner are needed to prepare a paella for 10 servings.

Rice Note: The exact quantity of rice will depend on the size of the pan and number of servings, so have at least 1 1/4 lb of rice on hand.

Prepare the ingredients. If using a whole chicken, cut it and the pork into serving-size pieces.

Clean the squid of innards and spine, then remove the tentacles. Cut the squid tubes into rings.

De-seed and cut red pepper into long strips. **Chop onions and tomatoes,** set aside for later.

Warm the chicken broth in a medium sauce pan.

Cook the Paella. If using a charcoal barbecue, light the coals. When the coals on the BBQ are covered in white ash, cooking can begin.

Place the paella pan on the heat and add enough olive oil to coat the bottom. When pan is hot enough, sauté the onions and tomatoes in the olive oil. Add olive oil as needed to prevent sticking. Once the onions are translucent, add the chicken and cook, browning on all sides. Add squid and cook, stirring often for about 10-15 minutes.

Add the rice, sprinkling in the form of a large cross on the pan. Stir for 2-3 minutes to thoroughly coat the rice with oil.

Crush the saffron threads and add to the warm chicken broth. Slowly pour broth into the paella pan until ingredients are all covered. Spread meat and vegetables evenly over bottom of pan.

Arrange mussels around outside edge of pan, pointing up. **Place clams and shrimp in pan,** spreading out evenly around the pan. **Add slices of pepper** on top.

Simmer, cooking rice. Add more broth if necessary. (If BBQ becomes too hot, raise the pan up, away from the heat.) When rice is almost cooked, sprinkle peas over the top.

When rice is cooked, **remove from heat and cover** with aluminum foil or large tea towel, allowing paella to “rest” for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

Slice lemons into wedges and serve alongside paella.



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