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Making Spanish Paella The Easy Way

By Noel Gomez

Paella is a saffron-flavored dish made with varying combinations of rice, vegetables, meat, chicken and seafood. Spain and the Catalan languages, paella means frying pan or pot. The traditional paella pan is flat and of large diameter, it can also have handles on each side.

In fact, paella is one of the most versatile dishes to make. Paella also has the advantage of being great to clean out the fridge and use up leftover meats and vegetables. Any combination will eventually be great the secret is in the chemistry. Spanish Paella is a dish that is generally made to feed several people. Moreover, Spanish Paella is quite flavorful the next day as the tastes have had time to mix together and become stronger.

Here are three basic steps to follow to make wonderful Spanish Paellas while leaving you the latitude to be creative and to make the dish their own by customizing it to their taste.

1. Preparing the rice. Select a type of rice that you are comfortable using. Feel free to experiment but know that Spanish Paella contains a lot of ingredients and if you are unhappy with the end result with a particular type of rice, you might end up with a lot of waste. Basmati, brown or a mix with wild rice can add great taste and texture. Follow the instructions on the package with regards to washing and cooking the rice. Finely chop some onion, garlic and tomato. Heat a saucepan and add olive oil once the saucepan is hot (make sure that the oil does not start smoking. Burnt olive oil is carcinogenic and quite unhealthy). Once the oil is hot, throw in the uncooked rice. Frying uncooked rice gives it a nutty taste. Let the rice fry in the saucepan for a minute or so. Add the chopped onion, garlic and tomato until they soften, mixing constantly. Spice with saffron, salt and pepper. Feel free to experiment. Cumin, Cayenne various fine herbs or even a bit cinnamon or cloves can easily be added for a flavoring of your own. This mixture should not be on the stove for more that three to five minutes. At high heat with constant mixing, none of the ingredients should stick but they should mix well together and soften. Once all the ingredients are combined, remove the saucepan from the burner and mix in some frozen peas. Add enough peas to make a well balanced mixture.

2. Choosing and making the meat.

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In a frying pan at high heat, brown some pieces of chicken. Upper thighs, drumsticks, breasts...it's all good. Do not cook the meat completely but brown the outside. Once browned, set the meat aside. Lamb can also add great flavor to your Spanish Paella.

3. Combination of it all

Cover the bottom of the Spanish Paella pan with the uncooked rice mixture. Add the browned chicken pieces on top. Add uncooked shell fish and small fish filets rolled up and fastened with a toothpick or string. Use any type of fish but make sure that its flesh will hold well together. Pour some chicken broth on top (if the broth is warm the cooking time will reduce). Note that you can also add wine for more flavor. Cover the Spanish Paella dish and cook for about 45 minutes at 350 Fahrenheit or until the rice is fully cooked. At this point you can add raw shrimp or mussels and cook uncovered for another five minutes.

In short, the secret to preparing the perfect Spanish Paella is to make it your own!

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Spanish Food – The Perfect Paella

By Linda Plummer

Looking for a traditional Spanish recipe? Without doubt, the best-known is going to be the prodigious paella ... that tasty, adaptable, gregarious dish famed throughout Spain and the World.

And, what an impressive choice of recipes exist for a pleasurable paella: seafood, chicken, rabbit ... or a mixture of all three! Perhaps you are non-meat eating ... well, just opt for one of the several vegetarian paella recipes. Bit of a health fanatic? Then substitute white rice for whole-grain rice or wild rice.

Got a large family and not much money to feed them on? Use plenty of rice and imagination along with a tasty stock, plus whatever you can find in the cupboard! I have certainly enjoyed many paellas where there have been more bones/shells than meat/ seafood! And, very tasty they have been too, the richness of the company more than compensating for any paucity in the ingredients.

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So ... how do you go about making the perfect paella? First of all, you need to choose your rice. The short-grained rice from Valencia – where most Spanish rice originates – is fine for making paellas. However, the "bomba" rice grown in the neighboring region of Murcia, is the "king" of paella rice: again, short-grained, it has the ability to absorb the stock whilst remaining firm.

Another "must" is to use saffron ("azafrán") to create the gentle, yellow color for which this delectable dish is renowned. Yes, it is possible to buy cheaper, artificial colorings but ... go for the traditional – it will bestow a wonderful aroma and unique flavor.

Many Spaniards swear a perfect paella can only be achieved when using a tasty, home-made stock. Whatever you decide, allow at least double the amount of liquid to rice. If, during cooking, the dish becomes a little dry, just add a dash more water or stock.

Another tip I have been told, on more than one occasion, is to gently fry the rice for a few minutes before adding the stock, ensuring that it is well-coated in oil. I think all Spaniards would agree that, once cooked, it is best to leave your paella to stand for a good five minutes before serving.

Perhaps the most important ingredient for making that perfect paella, is to use lashings and lashings of love whilst preparing it – for surely, that is something we can all afford – and to enjoy to the full the marvellous company of those who will share it with you.

I shall now have to choose a paella recipe to offer you as an example! I think I will opt for a seafood paella, typical of the region of Valencia, where I live. The ingredients are for a hearty four servings. If you are not a hefty eater, or on a diet, then reduce the amount of rice/stock slightly.

Paella Valenciana – Paella From Valencia

Ingredients: 4 cups rice. 8 cups fish stock. 8 king-sized prawns/langoustines. 8 mussels. 200

gr shrimps. 200 gr peas (fresh or frozen). 2 tomatoes, skinned and chopped. 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced. 3 strands saffron, crumbled. Olive oil for frying.

Method: Sauté garlic in a paella-type pan. Add tomatoes, peas, shrimps and saffron. Cook for a few minutes. Add rice and stock. Simmer for approximately 20 minutes. Decorate with prawns and mussels. Cover paella with a lid. Poach the seafood for a few minutes. Decorate paella with lemon quarters. Enjoy!

Linda Plummer is English, and has lived on the Costa Blanca in Spain for 20 years. She is webmistress of the information-rich site:

<http://www.top-tour-of-spain.com>

with its FREE monthly

newsletter, "The Magic of Spain".

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