

FEATURED RECIPE: PAELLA

By Andrew Hudson

WHAT IS PAELLA?

Paella (pai·ei·uh) is a classic Spanish rice dish made with rice, saffron, vegetables, chicken, and seafood cooked and served in one pan. When we celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary in Spain a couple of years ago, we experienced an authentic paella supper at Restaurante Levante which is said to have the best Paella in Valencia. Although paella originates from Valencia, it's recognized as the national food of Spain and there are several different varieties. The most common types of paella are chicken paella, seafood paella, or mixed paella (a combination of seafood, meats, and vegetables).

MAIN INGREDIENTS/SHOPPING LIST:

The main ingredients in every paella dish are rice, saffron, chicken, and vegetables. From there, ingredients vary depending on the type of paella or region where it's made. The ingredients in this easy paella recipe include:

Produce: onion, bell pepper, garlic, tomatoes, parsley, frozen peas.

Spices: bay leaf, paprika, saffron, salt and pepper.

Saffron: this may be the most important ingredient, so it's best to buy high quality. If your grocery store doesn't carry it, try an International food market, or Amazon. If necessary, substitute 1 teaspoon saffron powder. Saffron is expensive! Costco has a good deal on a small bottle, but get ready for sticker shock!

Seafood: jumbo shrimp, mussels, calamari.

Chicken thighs: I prefer thighs to breasts in the recipe since they don't dry out as easily during longer cook times.

Olive Oil: Spanish olive oil, or any good quality olive oil.

White wine.

Spanish Rice: See my notes below about the rice, and possible substitutions.

Chicken Broth: Authentic paella would include making your own fish stock from the discarded shells of seafood. I usually substitute chicken broth, for convenience.

RICE FOR PAELLA:

Spanish rice (also called "bomba" rice, calaspara rice, arroz redonda) is traditional in Paella, and it's what I recommend using. It's a short grain rice that absorbs more water than regular rice, without turning mushy. I have always found that Mahatma Paella Rice is available at your local King Soopers. Don't wash the rice before cooking because we want to keep the outer layer of starch.

SEAFOOD FOR PAELLA (WHAT TO KNOW):

If you don't like seafood, leave it out and substitute more chicken and vegetables. You can use any combination of your favorite seafood including clams, scallops and chopped pieces of fish. Frozen seafood is a great accessible option if you don't live near the ocean. (Costco sells a great mixed seafood bag in their freezer section with shrimp, mussels, clams, scallops, and calamari.) Be sure to thaw frozen seafood in the fridge overnight before using. When buying fresh seafood make sure to smell it to make sure it's fresh. It should not have a strong fishy odor. Most of the seafood used here will smell like nothing, or just like the ocean (slightly salty). Be sure to clean it properly (remove "beards" from mussels, if necessary).

PAELLA

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/4 cup Extra virgin olive Oil
(Spanish EVOO if you have it)
- 1 Onion , diced
- 1 bell pepper , diced (I like to use 1/2 red & 1/2 green)
- 4 cloves Garlic
- 3 roma tomatoes very finely diced
(or 8 oz. tomato sauce)
- Bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon paprika , sweet or smoked
- 1 pinch saffron threads*
- Salt and pepper
- 1/4 cup white
- 4 boneless , skinless chicken thighs , cut into pieces*
- 1/4 cup flat leaf Parsley chopped, divided
- 2 cups Spanish Rice*
- 5 cups Chicken Broth
- 1/2 cup frozen peas
- 1/2 lb Jumbo Shrimp or prawns, about 12 – peeled, tail on
- 1/2 lb Mussels (about 10-12), cleaned properly (beards off)
- 8 oz calamari rings
- Lemons , for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Add olive oil to a skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, bell peppers and garlic and cook until onion is translucent. Add chopped tomato, bay leaf, paprika, saffron salt and pepper. Stir and cook for 5 minutes. Add white wine and cook for 10 minutes. Taste and add salt if needed.
2. Add chicken pieces, 2 tablespoons chopped parsley and rice to the pot. Cook for 1 minute.
3. Pour the broth slowly all around the pan and jiggle the pan to get the rice into an even layer. (Do not stir the mixture going forward!).
4. Bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat to medium low. Give the pan a gentle shake back and forth once or twice during cooking.
5. Cook for about 15-18 minutes (uncovered), then nestle the shrimp, mussels and calamari into the mixture, sprinkle peas on top and continue to cook (without stirring) for about 5 more minutes. Watch for most of the liquid to be absorbed and the rice at the top nearly tender. (If for some reason your rice is still not cooked, add 1/4 cup more water or broth and continue cooking).
6. Remove pan from heat and cover pan with a lid or tinfoil. Place a kitchen towel over the lid and allow to rest for 10 minutes.
7. Garnish with fresh parsley and lemon slices. Serve.

DO I NEED A PAELLA PAN?

No, you can use a regular large skillet to make Paella (I use a 12x2 inch skillet and this recipe fills it to the brim). Traditional paella is cooked in a large paella pan because it allows the rice to be spread out into a thin layer and cook more evenly.

NOTES:

***Rice:** Spanish rice (also called “bomba” rice, calaspara rice, arroz redonda) is traditional in Paella, and it's what I recommend using. (If your grocery store doesn't carry it, try Amazon, World Market, or an International food market). If necessary you can substitute medium grain rice, like Calrose rice which can be found at Walmart or most grocery stores, and reduce the broth to 3 3/4 cups. (I don't recommend using Arborio rice or long-grain rice for Paella).

***Meat:** you could also use pork, turkey, rabbit, chorizo or a combination.

***Broth:** Authentic paella would include making your own fish stock from the discard shells of seafood. I usually substitute chicken broth for convenience.

***Seafood:** If you don't like seafood, leave it out and substitute more chicken or vegetables

***Saffron:** this may be the most important ingredient, so it's best to buy high quality. If your grocery store doesn't carry it, try an International food market, or Amazon. If necessary, substitute 1 teaspoon saffron powder.