

If you're looking for light, healthy meals that are quick and easy to prepare, try preparing recipes made with rice, a natural convenience food. Spending less time in the kitchen during the summer months is high on the priority list for most homemakers, so why not consider making a double batch of rice and refrigerate the extra rice to use late in the week for a salad, casserole or dessert.

Rice, a dietary staple for millions, can be a low-fat, economical, nutritious and versatile addition to many meals. Rice may be long, medium or short grain. When cooked, long-grain rice is light and fluffy and grains are separate and distinct. When short or medium grain rice is cooked, the

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grains are moist and tend to cling together. Here is a guide to help you understand the different kinds of rice.

Regular white rice has been milled to remove the hull, germ and practically all of the bran. Milling removes some of the vitamins and minerals. White rice has a bland flavor and tender texture. Enriched rice is white rice, plus

added vitamins and iron.

Parboiled rice is treated by a special steam-pressure process before milling. This forces the vitamins and minerals from the hull, bran and germ into the starchy part of the grain. Much of the natural vitamin and mineral content is retained after milling. Parboiled rice takes longer to cook than regular white rice.

Converted rice is parboiled rice made by a patented process.

Precooked "instant" rice is long-grain rice that has been cooked and dried. It takes less preparation time than regular white rice, but costs more.

Brown rice is whole-grain rice from which only the hull and small amount of the bran has been removed. The fiber-containing bran of brown rice gives it a nutlike flavor and a slightly chewy texture. Brown rice needs to cook longer than regular white rice.

Wild rice is not a true rice, but the seed of a grass that grows wild in shallow lakes and marshes. It is dark brown, distinctive in flavor and costs considerably more than other types of rice.

The price is right — One cup of cooked white rice offers a lot of nourishment for just a few pennies a serving. Different forms of rice vary in price. Most expensive is instant rice, which can cost up to four times as much as regular rice. Flavored rice mixes also cost more than regular rice. Similar mixtures can be prepared from scratch with little effort and less expense. A touch of any spice can spark interesting flavors in rice.

To make your meat dollar go

Cooking rice — To make 3 cups of cooked rice, begin with 1 cup of uncooked regular white rice and 2 cups liquid. Bring these ingredients to a boil in a 3-quart saucepan, lower heat to simmer, cover pan with a tight-fitting lid and cook about 15 minutes. For a drier rice, fluff cooked rice lightly with a fork and let stand in covered pan 5-10 minutes to steam dry. To obtain a firmer rice, use only 1% cups liquid and decrease cooking time slightly. To cook brown rice use 2% cups liquid and simmer 45 minutes.

Sticky, gummy rice occurs when the rice grains are ruptured and the starch granules are released. To avoid this problem, accurately measure the cooking liquid and avoid stirring or rapidly boiling the rice.

Cooked rice will keep for a week in the refrigerator if covered or 6-8 months in the freezer. To reheat rice, add 2 tablespoons liquid and simmer 4-5 minutes in a covered saucepan.

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