

Sushi Rice

Making great sushi starts with making great rice. Sometimes called Pearl rice, Glutinous rice or Japanese rice, Sushi rice is the most important ingredient in your sushi. Without well-cooked and well-dressed grains of rice, the best-laid sushi plans can turn into a disaster. It is essential that you use the correct variety of rice when making sushi to ensure that perfect consistency and adhesive quality so integral to good sushi. When the rice is of high caliber, the sushi will be too.

Of some 40000 varieties of rice in the world, sushi rice is quite unique in its ability to bind together and form the backbone to various types of sushi. Understanding the many strains of rice can at first seem very daunting, but it helps to think of all rice in terms of size: long-grain, medium-grain and short-grain. All sushi rice is short grain white rice, but it comes in different qualities based on grain integrity. All rice is classed in categories according to grain size when stocked in supermarkets, but also by other factors such as color and fiber content. Sushi rice is a white, short-grain variety, which means the grains are very small and almost round. Short-grained rice contains a high percentage of starch when compared to other varieties, and this is why the grains are so sticky. While most rice loses its excess starch with a quick rinse under cold water, sushi rice will always remain sticky.

When first picked, all rice is brown. Following the removal of the outer husk and the top 'germ' layer of the grain, rice becomes white. The grains will then be polished before they are packaged and sold as white rice. Brown rice has had the husk removed but kept its germ: the nutrient-rich layer that white rice has had scrubbed off. Wild rice grains are kept in their entirety, with both the germ and the husk intact. Brown and Wild rice varieties have the most nutritional value in terms of vitamins and fiber, however white rice offers pure carbohydrates that are necessary for energy. The lack of fiber in sushi rice is compensated for by the Nori wrapping, thus making a single piece of sushi quite a well-balanced nutritional treat.

The Japanese began cultivating rice sometime in the 3rd century BC. The moist environment was favorable for the crops and very soon rice became the staple of the early Japanese diet. Fermented rice was used to preserve meat, fish and vegetables in what was the prototype for today's sushi rolls: various vegetables and meats were stored in the center of a block of fermented rice. Rice fermentation evolved in itself, and eventually rice-vinegar was added to speed the long fermentation process. In the next two thousand years, the style of coupling rice with fish and other ingredients has become big business, finally appearing as the sushi we know today.

Rice cooking any rice comes with an element of trepidation for most people, and that's why I always recommend using an automatic rice cooker. Consistency is the name of the game. Depending on when the rice is harvested, there might be more or less moisture in the grains, and that will slightly affect your finished product. Don't feel bad if you get a bad batch of rice. You can learn from your mistake and add more or less water depending on your outcome. Once you get a recipe that works, you shouldn't have to worry too

much about how the rice will turn out. High quality sushi rice will have very few (if any) broken rice grains, so avoid over-processing the rice. Broken grains lead to a "mushy sushi" that is very disappointing. The sticky consistency should NOT come from overcooked or overworked rice. The rice is sticky because of an indispensable starch content and the addition of a mixture of rice wine vinegar, sugar, and salt.

Sushi rice recipes will not always work on the first try. If you are using a gas stove and someone else uses an electric rice cooker, there will be 2 different outcomes. Sushi rice recipes should be seen as a guide and adjustments will need to be made to fit your own circumstances.

The Sushi Rice Recipe

2 cups Japanese Sushi Rice
2 1/4 Cups Cold Water
1/4 Cup Rice Vinegar
1/4 Cup Sugar
2 Teaspoons Salt

Wash Rice in cold water until the water runs almost clear. This may take a few minutes. Once water runs semi-clear, drain rice of any excess water and add 3 1/3 cups water.

I recommend using a rice cooker at this point so that the rice comes out consistently. But if you choose to cook it on the stove then..... Bring the water and rice to a boil and cover with a lid. Once you put a lid on the pan reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes. After 20 minutes turn off the heat and leave covered for 15 minutes. It is VERY IMPORTANT not to lift the lid during this last 10 minutes. The rice is STILL COOKING, even though the heat is off.

While the rice is cooking heat the rice vinegar, sugar and salt in a pan until dissolved. Remove from heat as soon as sugar and salt has dissolved.

When rice is done, put rice in large bowl. Slowly add the vinegar mixture in to the rice while mixing the rice with a wooden spoon or spatula. The goal is to fold the mixture into the rice. The rice should stay as individual rice grains and not a glutenous blob. Another tip for making sushi rice is to let the steam (water) come out of the rice fast by mixing near a fan or open window. The breeze will allow the water to come out of the rice while adding the flavor from the vinegar mixture. Sushi rice is not sticky from over working the rice. It is sticky from the vinegar mixture lightly coating every grain of rice.

Store sushi rice at room temperature covered with a damp towel. This will keep the rice from drying out.