

Pandemic pantry recipe: Crispy, crunchy fried rice

By Louisa Chu
Chicago Tribune

When microwaved leftovers trigger flashbacks to sad desk lunches, but aspirational coronavirus cooking feels like too much work, you might try what's become my go-to pandemic pantry nonrecipe for crispy fried rice.

A hidden golden crust distinguishes this technique that's far easier than even nontraditional fried rice and grants you permission to stop trying to recreate your favorite restaurant's dish.

Rice cookers have eliminated scorched rice, the toasted layer left behind in a cooking pot. That is unless it's created with intent. Every rice culture shares a variation, from Chinese claypot rice to Korean dolsot bibimbap to Spanish paella socarrat to prized Persian tahdig.

A nutty hard bite as satisfying as a kettle potato chip or crackling pork rind transforms leftovers simply layered over rice. Use a nonstick pan or well-seasoned cast iron, and enough oil to barely coat the bottom, a ratio of about 1 tablespoon oil to 2 cups cooked rice. Top with whatever leftovers you have, and add fresh or frozen ingredients if you want.

In our heightened waste not, want not moment, remember to reward yourself that first bite of crunchy crust, which always belongs to the cook.

CRISPY FRIED RICE WITH ASPARAGUS AND RADISHES

Prep: 15 to 20 minutes



Louisa Chu/Chicago Tribune-TNS

Crispy fried rice is made with leftover rice, frozen peas and window sill scallions, plus fresh spring asparagus and radishes.

Cook: 15 to 20 minutes
Makes: 3 to 6 servings

You can use whatever leftovers you have on hand with this technique, but if you want a recipe for inspiration, here's the dish with spring ingredients to serve as a side or main, possibly topped with fried eggs or sauteed nuts.

1 bunch red radishes with green tops, about 1 pound, halved as needed to bite size
1 bunch asparagus, about 1 pound
3 tablespoons oil
6 cups cooked rice, hot or cold
1/2 cup frozen peas
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon soy sauce

3 scallions, greens sliced thin (save white roots to regrow in a jar of water on your window sill)
Butter plus lemon or white rice vinegar

1. Soak the radishes to wash well of sandy soil; separate the greens from the red roots. For the asparagus, snap off tough bottoms for compost; snap spears in half, separate stems from tips.
2. In a cold wok, skillet or wide-bottomed saucepan, add oil then swirl to coat. Add rice, then red radish roots and asparagus stems. Season with half of the salt and pepper. Cover, then turn heat on medium high. Cook until you hear sizzling and smell rice toasting, about 5 minutes.
3. Turn the heat down, then

carefully uncover. Scrape down any stray rice grains. Re-cover, then turn heat to medium and cook, about 10 minutes. Turn heat down again, uncover, break up any clumps of rice and check that a crust is forming underneath. Add a little more oil as needed. Add radish greens, asparagus tips and frozen peas, plus remaining salt and pepper. Re-cover, then turn heat to medium; cook, about 5 more minutes.

4. Turn off heat, uncover, add soy sauce around the edge of rice, then slide your spatula around the bottom crust. Garnish with scallion greens and butter; season to taste with lemon or vinegar for bright acidity. Serve directly from the pan, breaking crunchy crust as needed, golden side up.

FISH

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Drain off excess liquid. Return farro to pan; stir in sliced green onions and 2 tablespoons olive oil. Cover and set aside to stay warm.

3. While farro cooks, put shallots and wine in a large nonstick skillet and heat to a simmer. Cook, stirring often, until the wine is reduced to about 2 tablespoons, about 3 minutes. Add chicken broth and garlic; simmer until reduced again to 3 tablespoons, about 3 minutes. Set aside.

4. Season fish on all sides with salt and pepper. Drizzle lightly with olive oil.

5. Heat a large nonstick griddle or well-seasoned cast-iron griddle or skillet over medium heat until a drop of water sizzles on contact. Brush lightly with canola oil, then add the fish, skin side up in a single, uncrowded layer. Cook until fish starts to brown and releases easily from pan, 3 to 4 minutes. Use a silicon spatula or a very thin metal spatula to gently flip the fish skin side down. Cook until nearly firm when pressed, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn off heat; let fish rest on the griddle while you finish the sauce.

6. Set the skillet with the

shallots back over medium heat. When hot, whisk in the butter, 1 tablespoon at a time, just until the butter softens and melts. When all the butter has been added, remove from the heat. Do not let the sauce boil. Stir in half of the herbs. If the sauce is very thick, gently whisk in a tablespoon or two of hot water or broth. Season with salt and pepper.

7. Stir the remaining herbs into the farro. Arrange the fish fillets on plates, top with sauce. Serve with farro.

Nutrition information per serving: 714 calories, 37 g fat, 15 g saturated fat, 141 mg cholesterol, 58 g carbohydrates, 1 g sugar, 40 g protein, 92 mg sodium, 9 g fiber

SPAGHETTI WITH CREAMY CLAM SAUCE

Prep: 25 minutes
Cook: 25 minutes
Makes: 6 servings

2 cans (6.5 ounces each) minced clams
About 1/2 cup chicken broth or bottled clam juice
3 tablespoons olive oil
4 to 5 shallots or 1 small white

onion, very thinly sliced
Half of a 2-ounce can anchovy fillets packed in oil, patted dry and minced, optional
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 cup dry white vermouth or dry white wine
1 can (4 ounces) fire-roasted diced green chiles, optional
1/4 cup heavy whipping cream
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme or oregano
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes, optional
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
12 ounces spaghetti or linguine
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan, plus more for serving
1/3 cup chopped fresh parsley leaves or 3 tablespoons dried parsley

1. Strain clams in a colander set over a bowl to catch their liquid. Measure liquid and add chicken broth or bottled clam juice to make 1 cup total. Reserve liquid and clams separately.
2. Heat a large pot of salted water to a boil.
3. Meanwhile, heat olive oil in a large skillet; add shallots. Cook until golden, about 3 minutes. Stir in anchovies and garlic; cook, stirring, until anchovies dissolve, about 1 minute. Stir in vermouth; boil hard to reduce by half, about 3

minutes.

4. Stir in the reserved broth, chiles, cream and thyme; boil hard to reduce slightly, about 4 minutes. Season with pepper flakes and black pepper. Remove from heat.

5. Add the spaghetti to the boiling water. Cook, stirring often, until pasta is al dente, about 8 minutes.

6. Stir reserved clams into the skillet; heat mixture until hot. Drain the pasta; return it to the pot. Add the clam sauce, cheese and parsley. Toss to coat pasta with sauce. Serve with extra cheese.

Nutrition information per serving: 390 calories, 14 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 28 mg cholesterol, 49 g carbohydrates, 2 g sugar, 15 g protein, 800 mg sodium, 3 g fiber

VEGETARIAN TACOS



Dreamstime/TNS

Vegetarian tacos

Easy to fold, easier to eat

By Linda Gassenheimer
Tribune News Service

Wrapped with corn or flour tortillas or even lettuce leaves, tacos have become a national favorite. Whether for breakfast, lunch or dinner they're easy to eat and can be easy to make. Here's a vegetarian taco made with soft whole wheat tortillas. They fold easily and add an earthy flavor to the taco.

HELPFUL HINTS

Any type of canned beans can be used. Be sure to drain them well.

Any type of onion can be used.

Any type of flour tortilla can be used.

A quick way to defrost corn kernels is to place them in a colander and run hot water over them.

COUNTDOWN

Make Avocado Salad and set aside.
Make Vegetable Taco.

SHOPPING LIST

To buy: 1 red onion, 2 small avocados, 1 package shredded lettuce, 1 package frozen corn kernels, 1 can reduced-sodium black beans, 1 jar mild salsa, 1 package reduced-fat sharp Cheddar cheese, 1 carton reduced-fat sour cream, 1 package 8-inch lite whole wheat tortillas, 1 bottle reduced-fat oil and vinegar dressing and 1 can vegetable oil spray.

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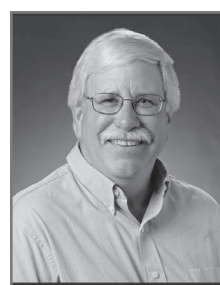
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