



RICE REPLACEMENT. Roasting or sautéing cauliflower caramelizes its natural sugars. Pictured is a serving of Fried Cauliflower "Rice" with Shiitake, Canadian Bacon, and Peas. (Sara Moulton via AP)

Cauliflower is surprisingly versatile

By Sara Moulton
The Associated Press

Until pretty recently, there was nothing sexy about cauliflower. Boiled or steamed, it's bland at best. And if you overcook it, you'd better duck or suffer the smell of dirty diapers. But roasting or sautéing cauliflower is a different story. The veggie's natural sugars caramelize and its tasty inner cauliflower suddenly blossoms. Think popcorn with an attitude.

Cauliflower is surprisingly versatile, too. Pulsed in a food processor, it ends up looking and feeling like white rice. Indeed, given that it's high in fiber and an assortment of vitamins and minerals, cauliflower is a healthy alternative to white rice.

In the interest of coaxing out cauliflower's best flavor, I have cooked this recipe's allotment as if it were fried rice,

sautéing it until golden. The "rice" is then infused with the usual Asian suspects — scallions, ginger, garlic, soy sauce, and sesame oil — and bulked up with mushrooms, Canadian bacon, and peas. (Vegetarians are welcome to swap in some tofu for the Canadian bacon.)

Wonderful as it is the first time around, this dish is also the perfect foil for leftovers. Steak, chicken, shrimp, other cooked vegetables? Whatever's sitting in the refrigerator and awaiting its second chance, toss it in. And if you need an excuse to go Asian, consider the Lunar New Year, which began January 28, kicking off the Year of the Rooster. Otherwise, feel free to enjoy this recipe year-round.

Editor's note: Sara Moulton is the host of public television's "Sara's Weeknight Meals." She was executive chef at Gourmet magazine for nearly 25 years and spent a decade hosting several Food Network shows, including "Cooking Live." Her latest cookbook is Home Cooking 101.

Fried Cauliflower "Rice" with Shiitake, Canadian Bacon, and Peas

Start to finish: 1 hour (40 active)

Servings: 4

- 1 small cauliflower (about 1 3/4 pounds)
- 1/4 cup plus 1/2 tablespoon vegetable oil, divided
- 2 large eggs
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 ounces Canadian bacon, cut into medium dice
- 2 ounces sliced shiitake mushrooms
- 1 1/2 bunches scallions, sliced thin (white and green parts kept separate — you will need about 1/2 cup of the whites and 1/3 cup of the greens)
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon finely grated fresh ginger
- 1 cup blanched fresh or thawed frozen peas
- 1 tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- 1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted

Remove the core and chop the cauliflower roughly into 1- to 1 1/2-inch pieces. In a food processor pulse the cauliflower in two-cup amounts until chopped into rice-size pieces (you should have about four cups).

In a large nonstick or stick-resistant skillet over medium-high heat, heat one tablespoon of the vegetable oil.

In a small bowl, lightly beat the eggs with a tablespoon of water, a pinch of salt, and some pepper then add the eggs to the pan. Tilt the pan to spread the eggs all around to make a flat pancake. Cook until almost set, 30 to 45 seconds. Turn over the egg (you can cut it in a few pieces to make it easier, using the side of a nonstick pan-safe spatula) and cook for another 10 seconds. Transfer the cooked eggs to a cutting board.

Add one tablespoon of the vegetable oil, the Canadian bacon, and the shiitake mushrooms to the pan and cook, stirring occasionally, until the bacon is browned at the edges, about six minutes. Transfer the bacon and mushroom mixture to a bowl with a slotted spoon. Reduce the heat to medium-low, add 1/2 tablespoon of the remaining oil and the white part of the scallion to the pan. Cook, stirring occasionally, about two minutes. Add the garlic and ginger and cook, stirring, one minute. Transfer the mixture to the bowl with the bacon mixture and return the skillet to the heat.

Add the remaining two tablespoons of vegetable oil to the skillet, then add the cauliflower and a hefty pinch of salt, pressing it flat with the back of the spatula. Cook until the "rice" is golden brown in spots, turning it over with the spatula, about 10 to 12 minutes.

While the "rice" is cooking, slice the egg into strips and add it along with the peas to the bowl with the bacon. When the "rice" is nicely crisped, add the contents of the bacon bowl, the peas, soy sauce, and sesame oil to the skillet and cook, stirring, until the mixture is heated through. Transfer the fried cauliflower "rice" to four bowls and top each portion with some of the sliced scallion greens and pine nuts.

Nutrition information per serving: 483 calories (350 calories from fat); 39 g fat (4 g saturated, 1 g trans fats); 121 mg cholesterol; 665 mg sodium; 20 g carbohydrate; 7 g fiber; 7 g sugar; 15 g protein.

Cambodia's "perfect pepper" conquering world's taste

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Kampot pepper. Most belong to the Kampot Pepper Promotion Association, which assists in price-setting and marketing while policing strict standards, including adherence to organic practices.

Cultivators use methods tested over 700 years, with some injecting new techniques.

Sorn Sothy, a former teacher and social worker, tries to reproduce the jungle environment native to the pepper plant on her small plantation. Palm leaves are used as shade; the soil is enriched with bat and cow manure mixed with bloodied animal bones. To ward off predatory insects, she sprays plants with a bitter extract from the leaves of neem trees.

The plantation run by Chaboche and Porre is Cambodia's first semi-automated pepper operation, but its more than 100 employees still do much of the work by hand. "Our growing is traditional. The processing is modern," says Porre.

Jean-Marie Brun, a French agricultural development expert, says the advent of large plantations could lower prices, and

possibly quality. "The future will tell us if the large plantations are as successful as the smallholder farms," he says.

Ngoun Lay, the association's head and a fourth-generation pepper farmer, waxes bullish about the future despite potential problems and ongoing robust sales of fake Kampot pepper, mostly from Vietnam.

A recent report, he says, shows European demand for the brand at around 200 tons while production next year is expected at some 100. Farm gate prices have tripled over the past seven years, keeping once-poor farmers on the land rather than seeking menial work in neighboring Thailand.

Stephane Arrii, producer of the Marquis de Kampot label, worries that extensive deforestation has degraded the region's soil. He says huge plantations on the still-fertile lands of northeast Cambodia could one day offer competition.

But will they match Kampot's quality? "As a Frenchman, I can attest that tasting Kampot pepper is like making love," says Arrii. "Once you start, you can't stop."

New Indonesia tsunami network could add crucial minutes

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everyone is convinced a tsunami detection system is essential.

"Why? Because the tsunami is too quick to arrive to the land. After the earthquake, we evacuate. No need to detect the tsunami. Just evacuate. That is the second opinion. That is why it is hard to have the budget," said Turyana.

Memories of the 2004 tsunami are fresh enough that Indonesians living near the coast typically run for high ground whenever the land shakes, as it frequently does.

Yet without a reliable system that reduces false alarms, a "crying wolf" effect

will eventually change people's behavior, say proponents of the detection network.

Not least, it can give disaster officials crucial information about a tsunami, such as the heights of its waves and where and when they will hit.

"This system is to make sure the tsunami is really coming," said Febrin Ismail, a structural engineer involved in earthquake mitigation and tsunami planning for Padang.

"Sometimes after the earthquake, people are running and then they see the tsunami doesn't come. In the future maybe they don't run again. We are afraid the quake itself is not effective."

