



A Formula For Fried Rice, Inspired by Ken Lee

Serves 4 as a light main course or alongside other food

If I want to guarantee that my daughter will love the fried rice I make that night, I'll add bacon. While it's tempting to cook the bacon in the skillet and use the fat to make fried rice, the smoke point of the fat is too low to work well in this dish. (Ask me how I know.)

Instead, I'll cook 8 ounces of bacon in the microwave or oven and crumble it when it's crispy to get the right amount for 4 cups of cooked rice. (Or I'll use leftover bacon, if such a thing exists.)

But really, any cooked meat or protein works, as long as it's somewhat dry.

Ingredients

For the sauce

2 tablespoons soy sauce, shoyu, or tamari, or 1 tablespoon soy sauce blended plus 1 tablespoon oyster sauce
1 teaspoon molasses or maple syrup
¼ teaspoon white pepper (optional)

For the eggs (optional)

2 eggs
¼ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon neutral oil with a high smoke point, such as peanut or rice bran oil

For the aromatics (use all or what you have...at the very least, I like onion and garlic)

1 1/2 tablespoons neutral oil with a high smoke point, such as peanut or rice bran oil
1 small onion or 2 medium to large shallots or the whites and light green parts of a bunch of scallions, chopped
½ cup chopped firmer vegetables, such as carrots, celery, or peppers
2 to 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh ginger (from 1 in [2.5 cm] peeled ginger)

For the rice

3 to 4 cups cups cooked rice (day-old rice is best if it's white rice)

For the additions (use all or mix and match)

1 cup small, tender bite-sized pieces of cooked meat (or meat alternative), such as poached or roasted chicken, roast pork, char siu, lap chong (Chinese sausage), ham, bacon, seitan, or fried tofu (fresh tofu is too wet)
½ to 1 cup bite-sized, quick-cooking vegetables, such as frozen peas, frozen broccoli, fresh asparagus cut into rounds, etc.
2 to 3 cups fast-wilting greens, such as baby spinach or chopped napa cabbage
Chopped scallions or chives, for serving

Method

Mix the sauce

In a small bowl, mix together the soy sauce with the oyster sauce (if you're using it), the molasses or maple syrup and the white pepper.

Cook the egg (optional)

In another bowl, lightly beat the eggs with the 1/4 teaspoon of salt

Set a large, deep skillet (either one that's nonstick or well-seasoned) or a well-seasoned wok (if you have one) over medium-high heat and warm 1 tablespoon of the oil until shimmering. Have a lid that fits over the top of the wok or skillet nearby.

Add the eggs and cook, turning them a few times so they cook but not allowing them to break up into pieces, until they're set, about 1 minute. As you cook them, move the eggs as necessary to allow the unset eggs to have contact with the pan. The goal is to have one piece of fluffy eggs.

Transfer to a plate but keep the eggs nearby.

For the aromatics

In the pan, warm another 1 1/2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat.

Add the onion and firm vegetables, if using, season with a little salt, if desired, and stir-fry until the onion is bright white and opaque and just starting to soften, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the garlic and ginger and stir-fry until fragrant, about 20 seconds.

For the rice

Add the rice and use a spatula to press down the rice into an even layer to quickly heat it and squeeze out any clumps, about 20 seconds.

For the additions

Add the quick-cooking vegetables, and toss with the rice, then spread out the rice with the vegetables in a single layer and cover the pan. Cook, until you hear the rice start to crackle, 10 to 20 seconds.

Uncover and use the spatula to flip the rice in large sections so the rice on the bottom is now toward the top; the rice should be a bit browned on the bottom in spots.

Spread out the rice again into a single layer and cover the pan. Cook, until you hear the rice start to crackle, 10 to 20 seconds.

Uncover and use the spatula to flip the rice in large sections so the rice on the bottom is now toward the top.

Add the cooked meat and return the egg to the pan. Stir a few times and break up the egg into smaller pieces.

Press the rice into an even layer to work out any clumps, cover the wok again, and cook until it begins to crackle, 10 to 20 seconds.

Give your sauce one more stir. Uncover the rice and pour in the sauce around the edges of the wok or skillet so it hits the surface of the pan. Stir the sauce into the rice until incorporated.

Add the fast-wilting greens, in batches if necessary, and stir-fry until the leaves are barely wilted, 20 seconds to 1 minute.

Remove the fried rice from the heat. Taste and season with a little salt, if desired.

I like when the fried rice tastes seasoned but not overly salty so the delicate flavors of the rice, eggs, and other ingredients can come through.

Sprinkle with scallions, if using, and serve.

Fun for kids

- Mix together the sauce
- Whisk and season the eggs
- Garnish the rice

Bonus points

- **Play with the sauce:** Sauce for fried rice should bring depth of flavor to the dish and help harmonize the ingredients together. Ken tends to like when there's a salty or umami base with a little bit of sweetness and heat from the white pepper. You can also play around with adding some acidity.
 - Fish sauce (instead of or in addition to the soy sauce)
 - Shaoxing wine (brings a little sweetness, a little acidity, and overall complexity; start by adding 2 tablespoons before adding your sauce)
 - Vinegar (for acidity; start with a teaspoon and increase if you want more)
 - Citrus juice (for acidity; start with a teaspoon and increase if you want more)
 - Red chili sauces, such as sambal (start with adding ½ teaspoon and go from there)

- **Try different garnishes**

- A swirl of sesame oil makes the rice extra glossy and brings a deep flavor. (You could add a little bit of this at the end; start with 1 tablespoon.)
- Toasted sesame seeds bring the nutty flavor with a little crunch
- Chopped cilantro has a freshness that's nice with fried rice