

Vegetable Paella.

Can you really have a paella with no meat or seafood? Absolutely. This is by no means a traditional paella in terms of ingredients but the cooking method is, and it is a beautiful dish to serve to friends. The key is to simmer the rice uncovered and resist the urge to stir it, so it absorbs all the liquid. Use a paella pan if you have one, otherwise a wide frying-pan is fine.

Serves 2 hungry people.

Ingredients

3 tbsp olive oil
½ Spanish onion, finely chopped
1 red pepper, cut into strips
½ fennel bulb, cut into strips
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 bay leaves
¼ tsp smoked paprika
½ tsp ground turmeric
¼ tsp cayenne pepper
150g paella rice
100ml good-quality medium sherry
450ml boiling vegetable stock (I use Marigold bouillon powder)
200g shelled broad beans (fresh or frozen)
12 mini plum or cherry tomatoes, halved
5 small grilled artichokes in oil from a jar, drained and quartered
15 pitted Kalamata olives, crushed or halved
2 tbsp roughly chopped parsley
4 lemon wedges
salt



Method

1. Fry onions in olive oil for 5 minutes. Add the strips of pepper and fennel and fry for a further 6 minutes. Add garlic and fry for a further minute. Add bay leaves and spices and stir well, then add rice and fry for a further 2 minutes.
2. Add the sherry and heat until absorbed, then pour in stock, stir well, bring to a simmer then turn down to the lowest possible heat and leave for 30 minutes, uncovered, without stirring. (You may need to add a little more boiling water if it seems to be getting dry.)
3. Whilst this is cooking cook the broad beans in boiling water for 2 minutes, remove from heat, drain and add cold water. Slip them from their skins.
4. When the rice is tender, remove from heat, scatter tomatoes, artichokes and beans on the top, cover the pan tightly with foil and leave for 10 minutes.
5. Remove the foil, scatter olives and parsley on the surface and serve with lemon wedges on the side.

N.B. I have cooked this recipe several times, and sometimes the rice stays quite chewy. I have overcome this by parboiling the rice for 5 minutes before adding.