

Alex Aitken

Exec Chef, The Jetty, Christchurch, Dorset

Paella recipe

Because this paella has so much going for it, you do not need to add stock to the rice. Boiling water will do, so long as you add enough seasoning to bring out the flavours of the ingredients. Make sure to use real saffron to flavour as its aroma is irreplaceable and it gives a distinctive quality to the dish.

Ingredients

4 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for drizzling

1 Spanish onion, peeled and chopped

1 large red pepper, deseeded and chopped

3-4 garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced

2 long red chillies, sliced on the diagonal (optional)

Few sprigs of thyme

4 skinless and boneless chicken thighs or breasts, cut into bite-sized pieces

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

125g chorizo, sliced

1 tsp paprika

400g Spanish or short-grain rice

Splash of dry sherry (or dry white wine)

1/2 tsp saffron strands

8 sundried tomatoes, roughly chopped - covered with boiling water to re-hydrate.

Tomato puree

500g clams or mussels, cleaned

monkfish tail on the bone

300g king prawns (whole or heads removed)

200g peas (thawed, if frozen)

300g squid, cleaned and sliced

Handful of flat-leaf parsley, leaves chopped

1 lemon, cut into wedges to garnish

Method

1. Put the kettle on to boil. Heat the olive oil in a large paella pan. Add the chopped onions, peppers, garlic, chillies and thyme.

Sauté the vegetables for a few minutes until the onions begin to soften. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and add to the pan along with the chorizo and paprika. Fry, stirring frequently, over a high heat to lightly seal the meat.

The chorizo will start to ooze a lovely golden oil.

2 Tip in the rice and a drizzle of oil, if necessary. Stir well to ensure that each grain of rice is coated in oil. Pour in a generous splash of sherry and allow it to evaporate before adding about a litre of boiling water, which should come roughly 1cm above the level of the rice. Reduce the heat, bring the liquid to a simmer and add the saffron. Stir well to distribute the strands. Add the tomatoes and season well. Simmer for 10-12 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent the rice from sticking, but take care not to over-stir or it will release too much starch.

3 Add the clams and prawns, topping up with more boiling water if necessary, and stir through so that the shellfish are submerged. Cook for 4-5 minutes over a medium heat until the prawns turn opaque and the clams start to open up. Finally, stir in the squid and peas. The squid should only take 2 minutes to cook – it will turn opaque when ready. Season to taste.

4 Take the pan off the heat, cover with foil and leave the rice to stand for 5 minutes. To garnish, sprinkle with a handful of chopped parsley and arrange the lemon wedges around the pan. Bring to the table and serve immediately.