Healthy Recipe: Brown Rice & Chickpea Paella

No need to be intimidated by the ingredient list — the super simple cooking method makes up for it.

May 15, 2026 By Cook for Your Life

While our version of paella is packed with veggies and plant-based protein, it still retains the saffron-and-tomato-based flavor and color that traditional paella is known for. No need to be intimidated by the ingredient list — the super simple cooking method makes up for it. You can even use leftover Brown Rice to cut down the number of steps!

30 min prep

4 servings

16 ingredients

Ingredients

- 1¼ cups short-grain brown rice
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- ¼ teaspoons crumbled saffron threads
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts
- 8 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 medium red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 medium tomato, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley
- ½ pound washed spinach leaves or frozen leaf spinach

- 2 teaspoons smoked sweet paprika
- 2 teaspoons thyme leaves
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ cup canned chickpeas, drained and rinsed (see Chef Tips)

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Combine the rice and 2½ cups of broth, bring to a boil, then lower to a simmer and cover. Simmer over low heat for 15 minutes.
2. While the rice is cooking: In a small pot, combine ¼ cup of water and 1 cup of broth. Bring to a boil, then turn off the heat. Add the saffron threads and cover to keep warm.
3. Heat the olive oil in a wide paella or high-sided saute pan over medium-high heat. Add the pine nuts and brown slightly, then add the garlic, onions, and red bell pepper. Cook over medium-high heat until the vegetables are slightly wilted. Add the tomato and parsley, and saute for 2-3 minutes or until the tomatoes have cooked down. Add the spinach and cook until it has wilted, if using fresh, or when thawed, if using frozen.
4. Stir in the paprika, thyme, cumin, and oregano, and blend well. Add the partially cooked rice, along with any remaining broth, stirring well to coat it with the mixture.
5. Pour in the saffron-infused broth and bring to a boil. Taste for salt. Add the chickpeas and continue to boil, stirring and rotating the pan occasionally.
6. When the rice is no longer soupy but there is still liquid left to cook (this should take about 5 minutes), transfer to the oven and cook, uncovered, for 20-25 minutes until the rice is almost al dente. Cover the pan with foil and let the paella sit in a warm place for about 10 minutes until the rice is cooked to taste.

Chef Tips

If you like to cook your chickpeas from scratch and enjoy a little heat in your food, cook them with a small dried chipotle pepper and a couple of whole cloves of garlic, and use the broth as part of the stock for the paella.

Nutrition Facts (per serving):

Calories: 441; Fat: 19g; Saturated Fat: 3g; Polyunsaturated Fat: 4g; Monounsaturated Fat: 12g; Carbohydrates: 60g; Sugar: 4g; Fiber: 7g; Protein: 10g; Sodium: 174mg

Registered Dietitian Approved

Our recipes, articles, videos, and more content are reviewed by our Registered Dietitian Kate Ueland, MS, RD, CSO, a board-certified specialist in oncology nutrition, to ensure that each is

backed with scientific evidence and follows the guidelines set by the **Oncology Nutrition for Clinical Practice, 2nd Ed.**, published by the Oncology Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group, a professional interest group of the **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**, and the **American Institute for Cancer Research** and the **American Cancer Society**.

This recipe was originally published on Cook for Your Life. It is used by permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.tusaludmag.com/article/brown-rice-chickpea-paella