

Eden Rice with Black Beans and Plantain

Slightly adapted from Ruby Tandoh's Cook As You Are

Serves 4

For the rice:

1 ½ cups (300g) white rice
10 ounces (300g) frozen chopped or whole leaf spinach, defrosted
1 ¾ cups (400 ml) cold water
2 teaspoons olive, vegetable, or coconut oil
4 garlic cloves, crushed or finely grated
1 bird's eye (Thai) chili, thinly sliced, or ½ teaspoon chili flakes
Generous pinch of salt

For the plantain:

3 ripe plantains, yellow-mottled with plenty of black spots
1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil
1 tablespoon chipotle paste
Pinch of salt

For the black beans:

2 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil
1 large onion, finely diced
4 garlic cloves, crushed or finely grated
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 bird's eye (thai) chili or ½ teaspoon chili flakes, optional
Two 14-ounce (400g) cans black beans, drained
2 teaspoons chipotle paste
4 tablespoons salted peanuts or cashews, roughly chopped
Scant 1 cup (100 ml) water, plus more if necessary
Salt, to taste

Special equipment: stick blender, food processor or blender, optional

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Rinse the rice thoroughly in cold water, changing the water a few times until it's no longer cloudy. Drain the rice well and set to one side.

In a food processor or blender, or using a stick blender, blitz the defrosted spinach with the 1 ¾ cups (400ml) water. If you don't have a blender, skip this step! The rice won't come out as vibrantly green, but it'll taste great all the same.

Heat the oil for the rice in a medium pot—one large enough to cook the rice with a good bit of room, but not so large that the rice will cook in a really thin layer—and add the garlic and chili, sautéing it over a medium-low heat for a minute or so. It's ready when the raw garlic smell mellows a little, but make sure you don't let it brown and burn. Add the washed rice, spinach puree (or unblended spinach and water) and salt to the pot, stir well to combine, then bring to a simmer. As soon as it begins to boil, put a tight-fitting lid over the pot, turn the heat as low as possible (it helps to transfer the pan to the smallest burner if it isn't already on it, and cook for 15 minutes. Once the 15 minutes are up, turn off the heat but leave the lid on, letting the rice steam in the residual heat for 5 extra minutes. It'll stay warm like this until you're ready to serve it.

While the rice cooks, peel the plantain (cut off each end, score the skin along the plantain's length with a sharp knife, then pull the skin off like a coat) and cut on the diagonal into elegant slices around ½ inch thick. Toss the slices with the oil, chipotle paste and salt, then lay out on a baking sheet. (*MB note: lining your baking sheet with parchment will make cleanup a lot easier.*) Bake for 10 minutes, then flip the slices and bake for a further 10 minutes.

Next up, make the beans—this is a really quick job. Heat the oil in a medium pan, then add the onion and cook over a medium heat for 6-8 minutes, until softened. Add the garlic, dried oregano, and chili (if using) and sauté for a further minute or so. Add the drained beans, chipotle paste, peanuts or cashews and a scant 1 cup water. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring often and mashing the beans against the side of the pan or under a spoon or spatula as you go. You want the beans to be broken and creamy, but there should still be plenty of whole beans to provide a craggy texture. If the beans start to dry out, add a splash more water. If they're too sloppy, just cook for a bit longer. Season to taste.

By the time that the beans are ready, the plantain should be just about ready to come out of the oven and the rice should have cooked and had its 5 minutes of resting time. Serve the beans heaped over the bright green rice and top with the golden, smoky plantain.

MB note: Leftover rice is DELICIOUS reheated in a bit of coconut oil.

Variations and substitutions

If you have fresh spinach, you can use it in place of the frozen spinach. Just blanch it (dunk it in boiling water, then quickly whisk it out and place it in ice-cold water to stop the cooking process), drain, squeeze out any excess water and roughly chop it. You can then blend it with the water as above.

As an alternative to plantain, you could serve this with sweet potato or butternut squash. Peel and cut into ½-inch slices, then coat with oil, spice and salt as above, and bake for 30 minutes, flipping the slices halfway through the cooking time. While I'll admit that it looks similar to plantain (and indeed they are related), banana is not an appropriate substitution.

If you prefer to fry the plantain—like you would for dodo or kelewele—forget about heating the oven and heat 1 ¼ cups (300 ml) cooking oil in a large frying pan instead. Coat the plantain with the chipotle paste (or spices) and salt—no need to oil it. Heat the oil to 350°F and fry the plantain slices for 2 minutes on each side.

If you don't have dried oregano, you can use dried marjoram, thyme or a dried herb mix. Instead of the chipotle paste, use 1 teaspoon smoked paprika and 1 teaspoon chili flakes.