



Felicity Cloake

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## How to make rice and peas - recipe

It's the staple dish of the Caribbean: a moreish rubble of beans, rice and flavour, flavour, flavour ...



📷 Felicity Cloake's rice and peas. Photograph: Robert Billington/The Guardian. Food styling: Lucy-Ruth Hathaway.

**R**ice and peas (or peas and rice, according to Bahamians) is to the Caribbean what polenta is to north-west Italy - it is, Jamaica's Helen Willinsky explains, "a staple of our diet", and so much more than a mere side dish. Traditionally served on Sundays, it's now on menus every day of the week, but it's also worth saving for a special occasion.

Prep **10 min**  
Soak **Overnight**  
Cook **2 hr**  
Rest **10 min+**  
Serves **6**

**200g dried kidney beans**, soaked overnight (see step 1)  
**1 garlic clove**  
**Salt**  
**1 onion**  
**180g smoked bacon lardons**, or thick-cut bacon rashers (optional)  
**400g long-grain rice** (see step 6)  
**400ml coconut milk**  
**¼ tsp ground allspice**  
**2 fresh thyme sprigs**  
**1 scotch bonnet chilli**  
**2 tsp butter**, or coconut oil (optional)

### 1 A note on the peas

In Jamaica, red peas, otherwise known as kidney beans, are the default choice, because they help give the rice its characteristic colour and sweet, slightly earthy flavour. In the privacy of your own kitchen, however, you could really use any dried pulses you like: black beans, for example, work very well, as do pigeon (*gungo*) or black-eyed peas. If you mix varieties, cook them separately.

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## 2 Dried and soaked, or tinned?

You can use tinned beans, but I wouldn't recommend it unless you find yourself in a carb-based emergency, because the bean cooking water seasons the entire dish. In such an emergency, start at step 5 and add the tinned beans, preferably with the liquid from the can to help with the flavour, at the same time as the rice.

## 3 Cook the beans

Drain the soaked beans and put them in a large saucepan with a litre of water. Peel and squash the garlic, and add to the pot with a teaspoon of salt. Bring the water to a boil, maintain that for 10 minutes, then turn down the heat, cover and simmer until the beans are just tender but not mushy - depending on the age of your beans, this will take anything between one and two hours.



## 4 Or use a pressure cooker

Alternatively, cook the beans in a pressure cooker, adding water to cover by a couple of centimetres and a dash of oil, as well as the garlic and salt. Bring to pressure, cook for two minutes, then take off the heat and leave to stand for five minutes. Release, drain and repeat, this time cooking them for seven minutes, then allow the pressure to release naturally (for these timings, I'm indebted to Catherine Phipps' excellent book [Modern Pressure Cooking](#)).

## 5 Prep the onion and optional bacon

Meanwhile, peel and finely chop the onion and dice the bacon, if using. Should you prefer to keep this meat-free, simply leave out the latter, though, if you do so, I'd be inclined to add a spoonful of soy sauce or a pinch of MSG at the end, to replicate those savoury flavours; I'd also urge you not to skip the extra butter or oil.





## 6 Prep the rice

Once the beans are ready, add the onion and bacon, if using, to the bean pot and leave to cook for another 30 minutes. Meanwhile, rinse the rice well in cold water, until the water runs clear. If you prefer, use long-grain brown rice, but increase the cooking time in line with the packet instructions. (More perfumed basmati or jasmine varieties will work here, too, but they'll lose the fragrance.)

## 7 Flavour the beans, then add the rice

Stir the coconut milk and allspice into the bean mix, then add the rice and push the thyme and whole chilli (prick it a couple of times with a fork first, if you like, so it imparts more heat) into the rice. Add the fat, if using - and you absolutely should, unless you're serving this with something very rich. The liquid should at this point come about 3cm above the level of the rice.



## 8 Cover and simmer

Season lightly, and remember that the beans and bacon are both salty. Bring to a simmer, then cover tightly, turn the heat right down and leave to cook undisturbed for 20 minutes (or according to packet instructions, if different). Take off the heat and leave to stand, still covered, for 10 minutes.

## 9 Finishing touches

Lift out and discard the chilli, garlic and thyme. Fluff up the rice with a fork, then season to taste. Rice and peas is delicious with grilled or roast meat, fish or plantains, and even on its own with a crunchy salad. Refrigerate or freeze any leftovers immediately. Thaw before reheating with a splash of water in a microwave or a hot pan.

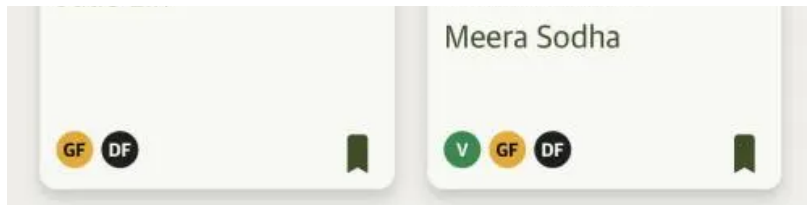


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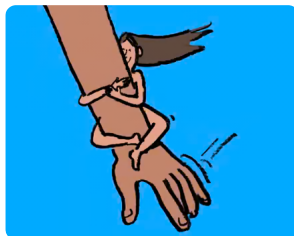
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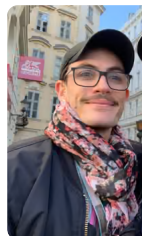
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