

Shellfish and Chicken Paella

Paella is arguably the national dish of Spain, and the best ones, it is said, come from Valencia in the south. Gloria and I had our best paella there in an unassuming little restaurant where the lady owner was the chef.

I have made paella with all varieties of rice, although conventionally it is made with Spanish short-grain. Italian Arborio rice, French rice from Camargue, and Asian or American rice work as well.

Although true paella is made in a shallow tin pan on an open fire and can include rabbit as well as snails or eel, I make mine with chorizo sausage and chicken thighs, adding shellfish at the last moment. I also cover the pan, which is not the traditional procedure, because this helps the mixture cook more evenly. The chicken, chorizo, mushrooms, onion, and garlic can be browned a couple of hours ahead.

I like to use commercial alcaparrado, a mixture of olives, red pimientos, and capers that my wife uses in her Caribbean cooking, and hot salsa, both of which are available in markets.

4 Servings

- 3 tablespoons good olive oil
- 1 chorizo sausage (about 1/4 pound), skinned and cut into 12 slices
- 4 small skinless chicken thighs (about 1 pound total)
- 1 cup diced (1/2-inch) white mushrooms
- 1 cup coarsely chopped onion
- 1 tablespoon coarsely chopped garlic
- 1 1/4 cups short-grain rice (Spanish, Italian, French, Asian, or American)
- 1 cup alcaparrado, drained and rinsed under cold water, or a mixture of equal parts diced green olives, red pimiento, capers, and garlic
- 1 cup canned diced tomatoes in sauce
- About 1 1/2 teaspoons saffron pistils
- 1/3 cup hot salsa
- 1 1/4 cups chicken stock, homemade (page 37), or low-salt canned chicken broth
- 1 1/4 teaspoons salt
- 20 mussels (about 14 ounces total), washed and debearded
- 5 large sea scallops (about 6 ounces total), rinsed under cold water to remove any sand
- 12 uncooked large shrimp (about 1/2 pound total), with shells left on
- 1/2 cup frozen petite peas

Heat the oil in a large saucepan. Add the chorizo and chicken and brown over high to medium heat for 5 minutes, turning to brown on all sides. Add the mushrooms, onion, and garlic, and cook for 1 minute. (The recipe can be prepared to this point a couple of hours ahead.)

About 30 minutes before serving time, reheat the mixture until it sizzles. Add the rice to the pan and mix well. Stir in the alcaparrado, tomatoes, saffron, hot salsa, chicken stock, and salt. Mix well and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce the heat to low, and cook for about 12 minutes.

Add the mussels, scallops, and shrimp to the pan, placing them on top of the rice without stirring them in. Cover, increase the heat to medium, and cook for an additional 8 minutes. Add the peas, cover, and cook for 3 minutes longer. Stir well and divide among four warm plates. Serve.