

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### What a Range of Rice!

Unless you boast a family heritage from Asia, chances are the only kind of rice your parents knew was plain white, no special name, no special flavor. Rice was just white rice. What a world of change to today! While we see very few of the 120,000 different varieties of rice, in any grocery store today we can buy long grain, short grain, brown rice, wild rice, even red and black rice, not to mention jasmine, basmati and Arborio rice. Are you overwhelmed by variety? Do you know what the differences are? I just had a tour of a rice mill and farms in Louisiana, and it was very enlightening.

Rice can be classified by grain type, by bran color, or by aroma. Wild rice is not truly rice, so we'll leave that for another article. There are 3 types of rice grains - long, medium and short. The type of starch in long grain rice makes the grains stay separate when they're cooked. So long grain rice is light and fluffy. If you want to make a rice salad, look for long grain rice. Long grain rice does look long. Each grain is 3 or 4 times as long as it is wide, and gets longer when it's cooked.

Medium grain rice is fatter than long grain rice. When it's cooked it sticks together more and is moister. It is a good choice for casserole dishes or to serve under stir-fry or with gravy. Arborio rice is a medium grain rice that gets very creamy and sticky when it's cooked. It is the best rice for risotto or any dish when you want the rice to pick up lots of flavor from the cooking liquid.

Short grain rice grains look almost round they're so short and fat. They keep a little chewiness when they're cooked, and while they stick together the grains are still

separate, not sticky. Sweet rice is a short grain rice that gets very sticky and slightly sweet when it's cooked. The grains almost fall apart and lose their shape, so it's often used for thickening sauce or gravy.

Rice color is an area where our choices are expanding. In the past we in America have pretty much been limited to white or brown rice. Brown rice is milled just enough to take the rough outer coat off the grain. The inner coat is the bran. It's usually a light tan to brown color, which is where the *brown* comes from in brown rice.

Leaving the bran on the grain changes the color, but also makes a big difference in the nutritional value of the rice. That's because the bran has all the fiber, 3.5 g in a cup of cooked rice. White rice has practically no fiber. It was all rubbed off and thrown away when the rice was polished to make it white. Brown rice has more than just fiber, because the bran has oils and minerals too. And the germ which is right underneath the bran also has oils and vitamins. Rice bran is a great source of minerals potassium, phosphorus, selenium, magnesium, manganese, some copper and even some iron. It has vitamins B-1, B-6, niacin, folate and some E as well. Polishing rice to make it white takes all this away. It's used to make dog food!

Besides our usual brown rice, we now are getting red and black rices in the grocery. These are varieties that have a red or black hull. They are similar to brown rice because the hull which has the color is left on. Both are considered aromatic rices because they have more flavor than white rice. Red rice is described as slightly nutty and black rice slightly sweet with a little bit of spiciness.

The other aromatic rices that we're probably more familiar with are jasmine and basmati. Both have a popcorn or nutty flavor and smell. Jasmine rice is a long grain

rice, but the grains stick together more than white rice does. Basmati rice is also long grain, with separate, fluffy grains.

Which kind is best? Other than saying brown rice has a lot more nutrition going for it, the answer is up to you. What are you cooking and what do you want the rice to do in your dish? Take your pick!

Here's a cute and tasty appetizer for your upcoming holiday parties. Or serve them to the children when they get home from school. Enjoy!

#### Salsa Rice Bites

3 cups cooked brown rice, cooled	1 cup shredded pepper jack cheese
4 eggs or substitute	1 16-oz jar medium salsa, thick & chunky
½ cup low fat plain Greek yogurt	½ tsp each salt and pepper
¾ cup crushed corn or tortilla chips	splash of hot sauce if desired

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix rice and cheese in one large bowl. In another bowl beat eggs, stir in salsa, yogurt, salt and pepper. Stir egg mixture into rice and mix well.

Spray 2 miniature muffin pans (12 muffins each) with cooking spray. Divide half of rice mixture into muffins. Refrigerate other half of rice mix. Press rice down gently into muffin cups. Sprinkle with half the crushed chips. Bake 15 to 20 minutes, until lightly browned. Remove from oven, cool slightly and remove bites from pans. Clean pans, spray with cooking spray, and repeat with remaining rice mixture. Serve warm.

Makes 48 mini-muffin bites.

Adapted from a USA Rice Federation pamphlet.