

Here is a detailed masterclass for preparing Native Rice, a flavorful and aromatic one-pot rice dish that is a staple in many West African homes, particularly in Nigeria.

It's known by many names: "Ofada Rice" (though originally referring to a specific local unpolished rice), "Dirty Rice" (because of its speckled, unpolished appearance), or simply Designer Rice. The true star is the signature Ayamase Stew (Ofada Stew) that it's served with.

This guide will cover both the rice and the essential stew.

Native Rice Masterclass

Part 1: Understanding Native Rice

The Rice: Traditionally, it's made with unprocessed, locally grown brown rice (Ofada rice). This rice has a distinct nutty flavor, a chewy texture, and a unique aroma. It's also healthier as it retains its bran.

The Modern Twist: Because authentic Ofada rice can be hard to find outside of West Africa, a common substitute is a blend of long-grain brown rice and white rice (often Jasmine or Parboiled) to mimic the texture and appearance.

The Stew: The rice is always served with a rich, green, and very spicy sauce called Ayamase Stew or Ofada Stew, made with unripe habanero peppers, assorted meats, and a generous amount of palm oil.

Part 2: Ingredients

We'll break this into two sections: the rice and the stew.

A. For the Native Rice Blend:

Option 1 (Authentic): 4 cups of local unpolished Ofada rice

Option 2 (Common Blend):

2 cups long-grain brown rice

2 cups parboiled long-grain white rice (e.g., Uncle Ben's)

Water: For cooking

Salt: To taste

Aromatics (Optional but recommended): 1 onion (sliced), 2-3 cloves of garlic

B. For the Ayamase Stew (The Heart of the Dish):

The Peppers:

Green Bell Peppers: 4-5, deseeded

Unripe Habanero/Rodo Scotch Bonnet Peppers: 10-15 (adjust to your heat tolerance!)

Large Onions: 2, roughly chopped (1 for blending, 1 for frying)

The Proteins:

Palm Oil: 1.5 - 2 cups (yes, it's a lot, but it's key)

Assorted Meats: 1lb total - a mix of beef, tripe (shaki), cow skin (ponmo), and liver is traditional.

Boiled Eggs: 4-6, peeled

Locust Beans (Iru): 3 tablespoons (Essential for the authentic, funky flavor)

Crayfish: 2 tablespoons, ground

Stock Cubes: 2-3 (e.g., Knorr or Maggi)

Salt: To taste

Part 3: The Steps

How to Cook the Native Rice:

Wash Thoroughly: This is the most important step, especially if using the authentic local rice. Wash the rice blend in multiple changes of water until the water runs almost clear. This removes dirt and excess starch.

Parboil (For Authentic Ofada Rice): If using the local rice, place it in a pot, cover with water, and parboil for 10-15 minutes. Drain and rinse again. This further cleans it and softens it. (This step is often skipped for the brown/white rice blend).

Cook: Place the washed rice in a pot. Add enough fresh water to cover the rice by about 1 inch. Add salt and any optional aromatics.

Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid, and let it simmer until the rice is tender and has absorbed all the water.

For the brown/white blend: This will take about 30-40 minutes.

For authentic Ofada rice: It may take 45-60 minutes. Check occasionally and add a little more hot water if it dries out before becoming tender.

Rest: Once cooked, fluff with a fork, cover, and let it sit off the heat for 5 minutes before serving.

How to Make the Ayamase Stew:

Prep the Proteins: Season and boil your assorted meats until very tender. Keep the stock. Fry the boiled eggs lightly in a little oil until golden brown. Set aside.

Prepare the Pepper Base: Roughly blend the green bell peppers, habanero peppers, and one onion together. Do not blend until smooth; it should have some texture. (Tip: Boiling the peppers for 5 minutes before blending can slightly reduce the intense heat.)

"Bleach" the Palm Oil: This is a crucial technical step. In a dry, heavy-bottomed pot, heat the palm oil over medium heat for about 10-12 minutes. It will turn from bright red to a light red, almost clear color. Watch it carefully to avoid burning. This process removes the raw taste of the oil.

SautÃ©: Carefully add the remaining sliced onion to the hot oil and fry for 2 minutes.

Build the Stew: Add the locust beans (Iru) and crayfish. Stir for one minute.

Add Pepper Mix: Carefully add the blended pepper mixture (it will splatter). Stir, reduce the heat to low, and let it fry for 20-25 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent burning. You will see the oil start to rise to the top and the pepper base will darken.

Season: Add your stock cubes and salt to taste. If the stew is too thick, add a small amount of the meat stock from step 1.

Combine: Add your cooked assorted meats and fried eggs. Stir gently to combine and let it simmer for a final 5-10 minutes for the flavors to meld.

Part 4: Pro-Tips & Serving

Heat Management: The stew is meant to be very spicy. To reduce the heat,

increase the ratio of green bell peppers to habaneros.

The "Iru" Factor: If you absolutely cannot find locust beans, a very small amount of fermented soybean paste (dawadawa) can be a distant substitute, but the taste will be different. It's best not to omit it.

Serving Presentation: Native Rice is traditionally served in a large, flat leaf (like an Umbrella or Banana leaf) for an authentic touch. At home, a plate works perfectly.

How to Serve: Place a generous portion of the native rice on one side of the plate and ladle the Ayamase stew right next to it or in the middle. The stew, with its meats and eggs, is the main event.

Classic Sides: It is often served with a side of Fried Plantain (Dodo) to help balance the intense spice of the stew.

Enjoy your delicious and truly authentic Native Rice meal