



Rice with Mixed Grains

雑穀米 (Zakkoku Mai)

In Japan, polished white rice remains a status symbol, despite the heightened awareness in recent years of whole grain's superior nutritional profile. In recent years, many health-conscious households have begun to add other grains to their white rice to provide additional nutritional value.

Pre-mixed packets of various grains (with, and without) dried beans, are sold in Japanese grocery stores under the name **zakkoku mai**, but it is a simple matter to create your own mixture of millet (*hié, awa, kibi* are three Japanese varieties), rolled oats, flat barley, quinoa, and/or amaranth. Select at least 3 grains, measuring 1/2 tablespoon of each in to a small bowl. Stir to mix.

To make **3 cups cooked rice**:

- 1 and 1/2 cups Japanese-style white rice (*seihaku mai*)
- 1 and 1/2 tablespoons mixed grains (*zakkoku*)
- a generous 1 and 3/4 cups cold water

Begin by **washing the rice**: The purpose of washing polished white rice is to remove excess starch. Place milled, raw rice in a bowl and cover it with cold water. Stir the rice vigorously to wash well. The water will become cloudy with starch that had coated the rice grains. I suggest you get in the habit of saving the intense *togi-jiru*, or cloudy water that results from the first and/or second rinsing of the rice, since it has many uses (see note at the end of the recipe).

Once the water runs clear, drain the rice. Add the multi-grain mixture, stirring it in for even distribution.

Instructions for cooking rice, **stovetop**:

Traditional instruction-jingle:

Hajimé choro choro, naka ppa ppa...

始めチヨロチヨロ、中ぱっぱー

At first it bubbles, then it hisses...

Akago ga naitemo, futa toru na!

赤子が泣いても、蓋とる、な!

Even if the baby is crying (from hunger), NEVER remove the lid!

Place the washed-and-drained rice-and-multigrain mixture in a sturdy, straight-sided pot. A 2 or 3-quart size should work well for the quantities given here; if you make a double recipe, you will need a 4 to 6-quart pot. Add the cold water. Ideally, the rice should sit in water for 10 minutes before cooking, but if you are pressed for time, add a few extra drops of water and cook right away. Cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid.

Over high heat, bring the water in the cooking pot to a rolling boil. You will hear bubbling noises and see the lid begin to dance after several minutes; this is the *choro choro* of the rice-cooking jingle. Reduce the heat and continue to cook until the water is absorbed (about 5 minutes), and you may hear a low hissing sound (*naka ppa ppa*). If you must check on progress, peek quickly, replacing the lid immediately.

Increase the heat to high again for 30 seconds to dry off the rice. Remove the pot from the heat, still tightly covered, and let the rice stand for at least 10 minutes. Even if you wish to serve the rice piping hot, these final minutes of self-steaming (called *murasu* in Japanese) are necessary to achieve the proper texture. The process of cooking rice is called *taku*, in Japanese.

Instructions for cooking rice, **in a rice cooker:**

Place washed, drained rice in the bowl of your cooker. Measure in cold water. It is important to use a COLD liquid when cooking rice in a thermostatically controlled appliance; using a warm or hot liquid from the start will cut short the cooking cycle.

Close the lid, press the start switch, and let the appliance do the cooking. Time required to complete the cooking cycle will vary with the appliance, but most will take about 40 minutes to cook 2 to 3 cups of rice.

NOTE: In the traditional *washoku* kitchen, *togi-jiru* (the starchy water created while washing the rice) was saved and re-purposed in a variety ways. *Togi-jiru* is used to tenderize (parboil) vegetables such as *daikon* radish, burdock root, carrots, bamboo shoots and corn-on-the-cob. The sediment that forms at the bottom of the jar of saved starchy water is used as a hand lotion (!!!) and to deodorize hands (after filleting fish or chopping onions or garlic)!! It is also used to remove distinctive smells from cooking pots (after making curry, for example). Garden plants like *togi-jiru*, too, so you can use this liquid to water potted flowers or herbs.



draining off *togi-jiru* (the starchy water created while washing the rice)
bottle of *togi-jiru*; pot with *togi-jiru* to cook vegetables (with *otoshi-buta* dropped lid)