

Horchata

Time: 10 minutes to make and overnight to chill

Sublimely light, icy, and frothy, horchata is the most refreshing summer cooler imaginable, concocted, improbably, from rice, almonds, sugar, and water. You'd never guess. You might also never guess that horchata is primordial, tracing its pedigree directly to the Persian tradition of crafting drinks from seeds and nutmeats. Horchata was originally made with ground gourd seeds and water—we're guessing our version is a lot better. The rice and almonds used here—steeped, pulverized, and whipped into a frenzy—combine to create a texture unlike anything else: creamy yet fresh and clean-tasting. Beyond quaffable.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a food processor, a large bowl, a balloon whisk, a medium ladle, a blender, a fine conical strainer—preferably a chinois—or some cheesecloth if you have no chinois, and a second large, deep bowl.

Ingredients

1 1/2 cups (6 ounces) blanched almonds, whole or slivered

1/2 cup (2.5 ounces) Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice Flour

3/4 cup (5.25 ounces) granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt

6 cups spring or filtered water

3 cinnamon sticks (it helps if they're fresh and fragrant)

2 or 3 drops almond extract (not more!)

1 cup whole milk (optional)

2 limes, washed

Ice

Directions

1. Turn the almonds into the bowl of a food processor and pulse until fine, about twenty 1-second pulses. Transfer to a large bowl, then whisk in the rice flour, sugar, and salt. Set aside.
2. Bring 3 cups of spring or filtered water to a boil in a kettle. Pour the water over the dry ingredients and stir for a few minutes with a wooden spoon or whisk. Add the cinnamon sticks and almond extract. Add the remaining 3 cups of cool water and stir

Tips

Horchata is traditionally made with whole rice kernels pounded in a *metate* — a rectangular, contoured stone used in Mexico and other Mesoamerican cultures to grind seeds and grain by hand. In the modern world, whole rice kernels are hell on your grinder, blender, or food processor. By using freshly milled, fragrant rice flour, as we do here, that particular sticking point can be avoided.

As for the almonds, we made two batches of this drink, one with whole, new-crop organic almonds (which we had to blanch and peel) and one with generic supermarket blanched, slivered almonds. As you might expect, the supermarket almonds didn't make as elegant a brew, but they're no deal breaker—and they do make the entire proposition easier to contemplate when you're on the fly.

Traditionally, horchata is a dairyfree beverage. We like the fullness a single cup of milk provides, but the drink is superb without it. We exhort those of you who are making Horchata Rum Punch, below, however, to add the dairy called for—in this case, heavy cream.

Another thing: Don't skip the

to combine. Cover well and chill overnight.

3. Remove the bowl from the refrigerator and stir the liquid briefly to bring up particles that have settled on the bottom. Fish out and discard the cinnamon sticks and transfer half the liquid to a blender jar. Set up a conical sieve lined with damp cheesecloth or an unlined chinois or other very fine sieve over a deep bowl. In the blender, process the horchata on high speed until smooth and pour it through the sieve. Push down firmly on whatever sediment collects in the sieve to extract all the liquid. Discard the dryish grounds. Repeat with the second half of the horchata.

4. Add the milk, if using, and pour the horchata into a chilled pitcher. Using a sharp peeler, remove the peel from the limes (peeling off green part only and leaving white pith behind) in long strips—you'll need 6 pieces. Serve the horchata over ice in 6 glasses, each garnished with a twist of lime peel.

Makes 6 cups

Horchata Rum Punch

Prepare the horchata as directed above, substituting 1 cup of heavy cream for the milk and adding 5 ounces dark estate rum.

Serves 6

salt. The drink tastes flat without it.