

# Anson Mills

1922-C Gervais Street • Columbia, South Carolina 29201 • tel. (803) 467-4122 • sales@ansonmills.com

## Savannah Red Rice

**Time:** 20 minutes to prep, 20 to cook

A rebuke to the legions of bad recipes in its name, this red rice comes out of the pot swirling with agreeable contrasts: cool bay, hot spice, warm tomato, light smoke. If you get lucky, it will have a fine, crisp bottom crust and the grains of rice on top will be plump, separate, and drunk with flavor. (The rice will be plump, separate, and drunk even if the crust doesn't happen.) Minced mushrooms and a dash of vinegar stand in for the historically correct mushroom catsup and represent a distinct improvement over the sweet tomato catsup present in many recipes today.

### Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a small saucepan with lid, a well-seasoned 8- or 9-inch cast-iron skillet with lid (or other similarly sized rondeau), a stainless conical strainer (medium-fine), and a couple of pieces of aluminum foil to wrap around the skillet lid for insulation.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup homemade or commercial chicken broth
- 1 cup Organic Strained Tomatoes (see Cooking Remarks at right) or tomato juice
- 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 1 Turkish bay leaf, crumbled
- 2 small whole chipotle chiles in adobo sauce
- 1/4 cup (2 ounces) smoked, sliced bacon, diced fine
- 1 small yellow onion, minced (1/2 cup)
- 3/4 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt, or more to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or more to taste
- 1 rib celery, diced small (1/3 cup)
- 4 ounces small button mushrooms, diced fine (1 cup)
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 cup (7 ounces) Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice, rinsed and drained

A *pilau*, Savannah red rice stands as a defining dish of the Georgia Coast. Red rice is so rich in influence it is hard to know which version of this dish to consider and where to begin. As far back as the Inquisition, Sephardic Jews fleeing Spain and Portugal arrived in Savannah, bringing connections to Mediterranean foodways (especially when it came to rice) that have endured to this day. In their emphasis on vegetables, herbs, and spices, these rice dishes often reduced meat, fish, poultry, and game to condiment status—with magnificent results.

Given this history, we might expect to experience good, even great, red rice today. Yet red rice is more institutional than inspired. At its best, Savannah red rice is scintillating in its flavor dimensions. The inclusion of pork in this dish shows elements of colonial Creolization, probably African or French. The addition of mushroom catsup (a condiment), with its dark, woody, vinegar notes, comes from 18th-century Britain by way of colonial India.

### Cooking Remarks

The "do not disturb" period at the end of cooking, known in the 19th century as "soaking," is designed to give the rice grains

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## Directions

- 1.** Pour the stock and tomatoes or juice into a small saucepan. Add the vinegar and bay. Drop the chiles (and any adobo sauce clinging to them) into the pan and mash them against the sides with a wooden spoon. Cover and bring to a simmer on low heat to infuse the flavors. Remove from heat.
- 2.** Set a well-seasoned 8- or 9-inch cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Add the bacon to the cold pan and sauté, stirring, until crisp, 5 minutes. Add the onion and thyme and sauté until golden, stirring frequently, about 5 minutes. Stir in the salt and pepper. Stir in the celery and cook until barely tender; increase the heat, add the mushrooms and cook until they have released their juices and the juices have evaporated, 2 minutes. (While the mushrooms are cooking, set the small saucepan back on the heat and bring the broth back just to a simmer. Have a stainless conical strainer and a 9-inch lid wrapped with aluminum foil—to assist with the seal—at the ready.) Stir in the garlic and sauté until its aroma blooms, about 10 seconds.
- 3.** Stir the rice into the vegetables and sauté until the grains are opaque, half a minute or so. Pour the hot broth through the strainer into the skillet, pushing with the back of a wooden spoon to get every bit of liquid into the rice. Stir the rice and lower the heat. Cover tightly and set the flame very low. Cook 20 minutes without lifting the lid. Remove from the heat and rest 10 minutes without lifting the lid.

**Serves 4 to 6**

a few minutes to compose themselves and help them resist breakage when they're spooned and served. Don't skip this step.

Our favorite tomato product for this dish is produced in Italy by the company Bionaturae. It comes in a jar and is called Organic Strained Tomatoes. A flowing, smooth, guileless sauce with a clean, forthright taste, this product is simple perfection. You may also use tomato juice or a comparable volume of canned tomatoes that have been pureed in their juices and passed through a strainer.

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