

SIMMERING MEALS AND CEREALS

Procedures for cooking meals and cereals such as polenta and oatmeal differ somewhat from procedures for cooking whole grains. Cracked or flaked cereals such as rolled oats consist of large particles. They are usually stirred into boiling water. Because of the size of the particles, there is little danger of lumping.

Granular meals such as cornmeal can be stirred into boiling water if care is taken to add the grain slowly and to stir constantly and vigorously while doing so, in order to avoid lumps. See the recipe for polenta (p. 654). Alternatively, combine the meal with cold liquid, stir, and bring to a simmer while continuing to stir. Mixing the meal with cold liquid separates the granules to prevent lumping.

Procedure for Simmering Whole, Cracked, or Flaked Cereals

1. Measure the correct amount of liquid into a pot and bring to a boil.
2. Measure the correct amount of meal or cereal.
3. Add the cereal slowly to the boiling liquid, stirring constantly.
4. Stir until some thickening takes place. Depending on the grain, continue to stir constantly, or stir only occasionally. Some cereals, such as oatmeal, become gummy with excessive stirring.
5. Reduce heat to a slow simmer and cook to desired doneness and consistency.
6. To prevent drying, keep the cooked grain covered until serving.

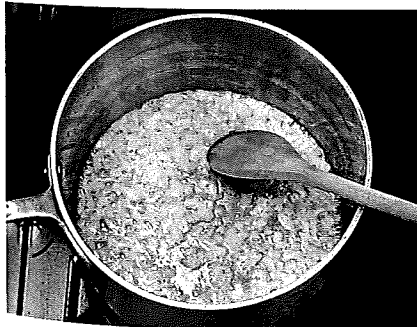
Variation: Simmering Meals and Granular Cereals

The procedure is the same as above, except the cereal is mixed with cold liquid. This separates the grains to prevent lumping. Place the mixture in a pot, bring to a simmer, and cook as in the basic procedure.

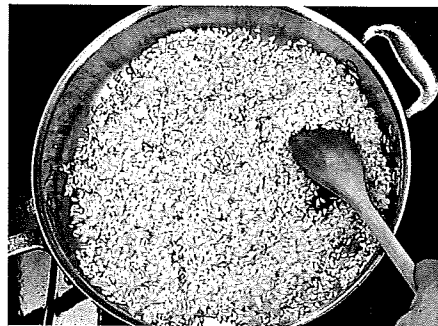
THE PILAF METHOD

The pilaf method is equivalent to braising. The grain is first sautéed in fat and then cooked in liquid—preferably in the oven for uniform heating—until the liquid is absorbed (see Figure 19.1). The fat helps keep the grains separate and adds flavor.

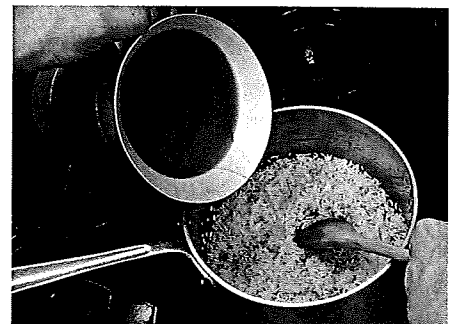
Figure 19.1 Making rice pilaf.



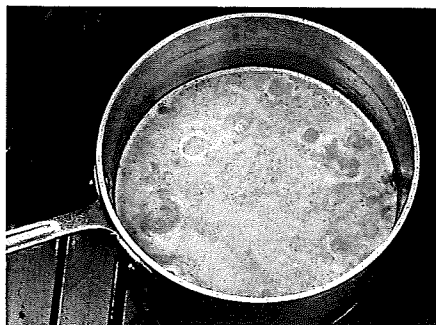
(a) Sweat the onion or shallot.



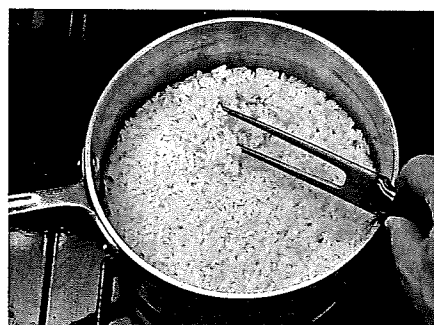
(b) Add the rice and sauté briefly.



(c) Pour in the hot stock or other liquid.



(d) Bring to a boil and cover. Cook at low heat on top of the stove or in the oven for the required time.



(e) The finished pilaf.

It is normal to measure rice by volume when making pilaf, as the proportions are based on volume measure. One pint of raw rice weighs about 14 ounces, or 1 pound measures about 2¼ cups (1 L weighs about 875 g; or 1 kg measures 1.15 L). Regarding exact measurements, see the note following the pilaf recipe.

Procedure for Cooking Grain by the Pilaf Method

1. Heat the desired fat (such as butter or olive oil) in a heavy pan. Add chopped onion or other aromatic vegetable, if desired, and sauté until soft but not browned.
2. Add the grain. Stir to coat the grains with fat.
3. Cook the grain in the fat, stirring, to toast the grain lightly.
4. Add the proper amount of hot liquid.
5. Bring to a simmer, stirring occasionally.
6. Cover tightly. Cook on the stovetop or, preferably, in an oven, for the correct length of time, depending on the grain.
7. Remove from the heat and let stand, covered, to allow the moisture to be absorbed uniformly by the grain.

THE RISOTTO METHOD

Risotto is a classic Italian preparation made by a special procedure that is like neither the boiling method nor the pilaf method. After sautéing the rice, add a small amount of hot stock or other liquid and stir until the liquid is absorbed. Repeat this procedure until the rice is cooked but still firm. Risotto should be served quickly, as it does not hold well. The finished product has a creamy consistency due to the starch that is cooked out of the rice. The grains are not fluffy and separate.

The word *risotto* comes from the Italian word *riso*, meaning “rice.” Other grains can be cooked using the same method, although strictly speaking they should not be called *risotto*. In Italy, farro cooked by the risotto method is called *farrotto*, and orzo pasta cooked this way is called *orzotto*. In the English-speaking world, however, the word *risotto* is more likely to be understood and is often used on menus, but with the grain specified if any type other than rice is used. For example, farrotto might be called *farro risotto*.

Procedure for Cooking Grain by the Risotto Method

1. Heat the desired fat (such as butter or olive oil) in a heavy pan. Add chopped onion or other aromatic vegetable, if desired, and sauté until soft but not browned.
2. Add the grain. Stir to coat the grains with fat.
3. Cook the grain in the fat, stirring, to toast the grain lightly.
4. Add a small amount of boiling liquid. Cook slowly, stirring, until the liquid is absorbed by the grain.
5. Add a second small quantity of liquid and repeat the procedure.
6. Continue adding a small quantity of liquid at a time, stirring constantly, and waiting until the liquid is absorbed before adding more.
7. Stop adding liquid when the grain is tender but still firm. It should be moist and creamy but not runny.

KEY POINTS TO REVIEW

- What are the steps in the basic procedure for simmering rice and other grains?
- How is the procedure for cooking cracked and flaked cereals different from cooking meals or granular cereals?
- What are the steps in the procedure for cooking grain by the pilaf method?
- What are the steps in the procedure for cooking grain by the risotto method?

