



# Rice

## **History**

Rice is thought to be one of the first grains ever cultivated by man. Other grains were harvested wild, but not specifically planted and harvested for their seed at first. It is not known when rice was first cultivated, but it is thought to have been around 2,000 B.C. Rice is now the most important food for more than half the world's population. Around 90% of the world's rice is consumed in Asia.

Rice is not native to North America. The wild rice that grows in the north central United States is a different grain. Rice came to the colonies in 1694 when a storm battered ship limped into the Charleston, South Carolina harbor for repairs. The ship's captain gave a local planter a small amount of "Golde Seede Rice" that was grown as "Carolina Golde" and in 1700 became one of North America's first agricultural exports.

Today, the United States is among the top five exporters of rice in the world. Approximately half of the United States rice crop is exported to more than 120 countries worldwide.

## **Geography**

Rice requires long, wet growing seasons unbroken by cold and snow. It needs flat areas of wet land with heavy soil. It also needs plenty of rain or water for flooding the young plants in their fields, which are called paddies. Finally, much hand labor is often used. In some Asian countries where there are many people available to plant the rice by hand, 100 acres of rice may need 100 to 300 laborers to prepare the soil, plant the rice and harvest the crop.

In the United States, much more equipment is used to cultivate rice. Only six states account for 99% of the rice grown in the United States, including Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Texas.

## **Nutrition**

Rice is a cereal grain and belongs in the grain section of MyPlate. Foods from this group provide fuel for our bodies from complex carbohydrates (known as starches) and fiber. Rice also provides B-vitamins, iron and protein. It is very low in sodium and fat in their natural state. Rice has no gluten, a protein to which some people are allergic to.

Rice is most often eaten as a side dish with meat, fish, beans, lentils or vegetables. It may be cooked and mixed into soups, casseroles and other foods. Often, Mexican, Indian and Asian foods are all served with rice. Seasoned cooked rice is called a pilaf.