

## Arroz con Gandules

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## Arroz con Gandules

By Anonymous

Arroz con gandules is a Puerto Rican dish traditionally composed of rice, gandules (also known as pigeon peas), pork, and sofrito. It can be eaten by itself, or as a side dish, paired with things like pernil or carne guisada. I've eaten this dish a lot in my life, usually at home or at my cousin's house, but the best memories I have of eating it took place at a restaurant called Señor Big Ed. Señor Big Ed, or just Big Ed's as we call it, was a local restaurant that served both Puerto Rican and Mexican food. For most of my childhood, every couple of months or so my mom's side of the family would get together at this restaurant to catch up and eat Puerto Rican food together. There were so many of us that four or five tables would have to be pushed together to accommodate us all, and we were always there for at least three hours. Every time I went, I always got something with arroz con gandules on the side or I just got a whole plate of it. I always looked forward to eating it, and also getting to eat the gandules from my mom's rice as she's not a big fan of them and would just pick around them.

This dish directly connects me to my loved ones because I can't think of it without thinking of my family. When I think of arroz con gandules, I think of eating it during thanksgiving at my cousin's house and everyone agreeing that she makes it the closest to how nana (my great grandmother) made it. I think of my mom making it for dinner, and being so excited to bring leftovers to school for lunch so I could show all of my friends what Puerto Rican food looked and tasted like. I think of going to Big Ed's and spending time with my extended family, and all of us eating something that came with a side of it. Arroz con gandules directly ties me to my family, and all of the memories we have made together throughout my life. Additionally, it connects me to my ancestors, and lost loved ones, and helps to keep their memories alive. Usually when my mom makes arroz con gandules she talks about family, and tells stories

about them surrounding the dish. Some of the people in those stories died long before I was born, but through this dish I am able to know them and help keep their memory living on. I am also able to learn more about the loved ones that died when I was young, who I don't remember all that well or didn't get to know very much.

This dish allows my family to share our culture with other people. Based on my experience, a lot of people have never had Puerto Rican food before, or even know what it is. Most of the time when people find out that I am Puerto Rican the first thing they ask about is the food. Arroz con gandules is a Puerto Rican staple, and by sharing it with other people I get to share a little of my culture with them, and introduce them to things they probably wouldn't have had on their own.

There are many different ways to make arroz con gandules, but I will be writing down the recipe my mom uses.

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups of medium grain rice
- 4 - 5 cups of beef broth or water (can also use vegetable broth, but it tastes better with beef broth or water)
- ½ cup of sofrito (can be homemade, but jarred is just fine.)
- 2ish spoonfuls of alcaparrado
- A 16 ounce can of gandules (can also use fresh or frozen, but canned ones are the easiest to cook with)
- 1 packet of Sazon with achiote
- A 4 ounce can of tomato sauce
- 3 tablespoons of oil (any is fine)
- Salt, pepper, and adobo (or any other seasoning you think would make it taste good)

### Recipe:

- In a caldero add the oil, tomato sauce, sofrito, sazón packet, and alcaparrado, and cook over medium heat for around 4 minutes

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- Add the rest of the ingredients into the pot, and add water till the rice is covered (about 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of water for every cup of rice).
- Mix in a pinch of salt, pepper and adobo, and keep adding more till satisfied with the taste
- Bring to a boil and cook over high heat until most of the water has been absorbed
- After the water has been absorbed, stir gently (only once or twice), cover the caldero and turn the heat down to low
- Cook for around 30 minutes or just until the rice is tender
- Once the rice is tender, it is ready to eat

### Additional Information:

- In total it takes about an hour from start to finish to make this
- Any rice that is crispy and stuck to the bottom of the caldero is called pegao. Some pegao is usually made on its own when making arroz con gandules, but if you want to make it on purpose use more oil and let the rice cook for longer than suggested. Additionally, you can just use a bigger pot to get more of it.
- Traditionally this dish has pieces of pork in it but it's completely optional to add in. I have had it with pork and without pork, and don't really notice a difference in flavor between them

The process of cooking feels very cathartic. I can't think of, talk about, or eat arroz con gandules without thinking of my family in some way or another. Without this dish, and food in general, I don't think my relationship with my family would be as strong as it is now, and I don't think I would know as much about my ancestors or my culture as I do now. Revisiting this dish has opened my eyes and helped me see just how important food is fostering relationships and keeping them alive.