Drinks / Mexico

Mexican Horchata

A cold, milky-white drink made by soaking rice overnight with cinnamon and then blending it into a slightly grainy, sweet water that is one of the most soothing things a hot afternoon can offer — starchy, gently spiced, and fragrant with a vanilla-adjacent warmth that has nothing to do with dairy and everything to do with rice and time.

Time 495 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 1 parts Long-grain white rice, uncooked, unrinsed
- ☐ 4 parts Cold water (for soaking)
- ☐ 0.1 parts Mexican cinnamon sticks (canela, Ceylon-type — not cassia)
- ☐ 0.3 parts Caster sugar or piloncillo (raw cane sugar cone)
- ☐ 0.01 parts Pure vanilla extract
- ☐ 2 parts Additional cold water (for blending and diluting)
- ☐ 1 parts (optional) Whole milk or evaporated milk (optional, for a creamier horchata)

Let's make it.

01 Combine the uncooked, unrinsed rice and cinnamon sticks in a large bowl or jar. The rice is left unrinsed intentionally — the surface starch on the grains is what gives horchata its characteristic milky, slightly thick texture. If you rinsed the rice, you would wash away the starch that makes horchata different from simple rice water. Pour the cold water over the rice and cinnamon, making sure all the rice is submerged. Cover and refrigerate for a minimum of 8 hours, ideally overnight (up to 16 hours). During this soak, the rice absorbs water and begins to swell and soften, and the cinnamon slowly infuses its volatile oils into the water. After 8 hours, the water will be faintly opaque and smell warmly of cinnamon. Do not soak longer than 16 hours — the rice can begin to ferment slightly, giving an off, sour note.

02 Remove the cinnamon sticks from the soaked rice (they have done their work). Pour the rice and all its soaking water into a blender. Add the additional cold water. Blend on high speed for a full 2 minutes — this is longer than you think necessary, but thorough blending is what determines whether your horchata is smooth or gritty. The mixture will turn from opaque milky to a thick, whitish suspension that looks like very thin oatmeal. Do not stop blending early. After 2 minutes, the rice should be completely broken down into a fine powder suspended in water. If your blender is not powerful, blend in 30-second bursts with a rest in between to prevent the motor overheating. The blended mixture will smell powerfully of rice and cinnamon together — a warm, starchy, comforting smell.

03 Line a fine-mesh sieve with a double layer of cheesecloth, or use a nut milk bag. Pour the blended mixture through in batches, pressing and squeezing the solids firmly to extract all liquid. The solids that remain (the rice pulp) can be dried and used as rice flour, composted, or added to smoothies — do not discard them carelessly. What pours through will be a smooth, pure white liquid. The degree of straining determines the texture of the final drink: through cheesecloth it will be completely smooth and silky; through just a mesh sieve it will have a slight, authentic graininess that many traditional horchatas retain. Taste the strained liquid: it should be lightly sweet from the rice starch, warm from the cinnamon, and have a clean, slightly chalky finish — unflavoured and in need of sugar and vanilla.

04 Add the sugar to the strained horchata base and stir until fully dissolved — if using piloncillo, grate it finely first or dissolve it in a small amount of warm water before adding. Add the vanilla extract. If using milk or evaporated milk, stir it in now — the evaporated milk version is richer and more indulgent, closer to a horchata con leche from a taqueria counter. Taste carefully: the horchata should be sweet but not cloying, with a warm cinnamon background, a slight rice starchiness, and a vanilla note that rounds the edges. Adjust sugar to taste. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving — horchata tastes profoundly better cold. Serve over plenty of ice in tall glasses with a dusting of ground cinnamon on top. It keeps for 3 days refrigerated — stir well before each serving as the starch settles.

Recipe & provenance ForkRecipe Kitchen / ForkRecipe / FoodML and contributors / CC BY-SA 4.0.
Original recipe and attribution CC BY-SA 4.0
Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
recipes.dvs-services.be / horchata