Sauces / Spain

Paella Sofrito

The dark, jammy foundation of every great paella — tomatoes and peppers cooked down to a concentrated, saffron-kissed paste that smells of a Valencia market at noon, caramelized and deep.

Time 50 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 3 parts Extra-virgin olive oil
- ☐ 2 parts White onion, finely diced
- ☐ 0.3 parts Garlic cloves, minced
- ☐ 1.5 parts Red bell pepper, finely diced
- ☐ 6 parts Ripe tomatoes, grated on a box grater (discard skins)
- ☐ 0.5 parts Sweet smoked paprika (pimentón dulce)
- ☐ 0.01 parts Saffron threads, steeped in 2 tbsp warm water
- ☐ 0.1 parts Fine sea salt
- ☐ 0.2 parts Fresh flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped

Let's make it.

01 Crumble the saffron threads into a small bowl or ramekin. Pour 2 tablespoons of warm (not boiling) water over them and let steep for at least 10 minutes. The liquid will turn a vivid amber-gold. Heating the saffron in warm water releases its crocin pigments and safranal aroma compounds far more efficiently than adding dry threads directly to a hot pan.

02 Warm the olive oil in a wide, heavy pan (the paella pan if available) over medium heat. Add the onion first and cook, stirring occasionally, for 8-10 minutes until soft and translucent with golden edges. Add the garlic and red pepper and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring frequently. The vegetables should be completely soft and starting to caramelize at the edges — not raw, not browned.

03 Add the grated tomatoes, smoked paprika, and salt to the pan. Stir to combine and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, for 20-25 minutes. The sofrito is done when the tomato water has fully evaporated, the mass has darkened from bright red to a deep brick-red, and the oil has begun to separate and pool at the edges of the paste. This concentration step is not optional — a watery sofrito produces gummy, bland paella.

04 Pour the saffron water (liquid and threads) over the concentrated sofrito. Stir vigorously to incorporate — the paste will sizzle and tighten momentarily as the liquid contacts the hot oil. Cook for 2 more minutes to drive off the water and let the saffron flavor fully bloom into the paste. Remove from heat, stir in the fresh parsley, and use immediately as the base of your paella, or cool and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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