Main dishes / Thailand

Sticky Rice (Khao Niao)

Northern Thailand's staple glutinous rice — soaked overnight and steamed in a bamboo basket over a clay pot of boiling water until the grains turn translucent and sticky, perfect for rolling into balls and dipping into everything.

Time 360 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 400 g Thai glutinous (sweet) rice, long-grain
- ☐ 1200 g Cold water, for soaking
- ☐ 1500 g Boiling water, for steaming (in pot below)

Let's make it.

01 Rinse the glutinous rice under cold running water, swirling with your hand, until the water runs mostly clear — this removes excess surface starch that would otherwise make the cooked rice gummy rather than sticky. Transfer to a large bowl and cover with cold water by at least 5 cm. Soak for a minimum of 4 hours; overnight (8–12 hours) is strongly preferred. The grains must be fully hydrated before steaming — without this soak, the interior of each grain will remain hard and chalky no matter how long you steam them. The rice is ready to drain when each grain has swollen, turned chalky-white all the way through, and feels soft when pressed between two fingers but does not shatter.

02 Pour the boiling water into a wide clay pot, wok, or large saucepan — whichever will fit your bamboo steaming basket (or a heatproof colander lined with muslin). The water should be deep enough that it does not touch the bottom of the basket, but not so high that you have to refill frequently. Bring it to a full, rolling boil before loading the rice. Line the bamboo basket with a single layer of damp cheesecloth or muslin to prevent rice from falling through the slats.

03 Spread the drained glutinous rice evenly in the lined bamboo basket in a layer no thicker than 4 cm. Cover and steam over the vigorously boiling water for 12 minutes. The heat will gelatinize the outer layers of starch first. After 12 minutes, flip the rice mass over using the cloth liner — this is the key step that ensures even cooking from both surfaces. The bottom layer will already look glossy and slightly translucent; the top will still look chalky. After flipping, level the mass and continue steaming for another 8–10 minutes.

04 After a total of 20–22 minutes steaming (12 minutes + 8–10 minutes after flip), remove the basket from the pot. Taste a few grains from the center of the mass — they should be uniformly tender, sticky, and slightly sweet with no chalky or hard core. Turn the rice out of the cloth into a traditional sticky-rice serving basket (a krathip) or a covered bowl lined with a clean cloth to keep it warm and prevent it from drying out. Do not leave it exposed to air — it stiffens within minutes. Sticky rice is eaten by hand: pinch a small amount and roll it into a ball with your fingers, using the warm, malleable texture of the rice itself as the adhesive.

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