How to cook quinoa: fluffy every time

By the Vegochef team · Editorial standards · Last checked 27 Oct 2026 · 6 min read

Quick answer: rinse 1 cup of quinoa, then simmer it in 2 cups of water with a pinch of salt, covered, for 15 minutes until the water is absorbed. Take it off the heat, leave the lid on for 5–10 minutes, then fluff with a fork. 1 cup of dry quinoa makes about 3 cups cooked.

Quinoa (say "keen-wah") cooks in 15 minutes and works almost anywhere you'd use rice. Getting it fluffy instead of soggy or bitter comes down to three things: rinse it, use the right amount of water, and let it rest.

The basics at a glance

METHOD	QUINOA : WATER	TIME
Stove	1 : 2 (1 : 1¾ for firmer)	15 min simmer + 5–10 min rest
Rice cooker	1 : 2	White rice setting, then 10 min rest
Pressure cooker / Instant Pot	1 : 1¼	1 min at high pressure + 10 min natural release
Red or black quinoa	1 : 2	Add 2–5 min; stays a little firmer

Yield: 1 cup (about 170 g) of dry quinoa makes about 3 cups cooked, enough for 3–4 servings as a side.

How to cook quinoa on the stove

1. **Rinse.** Put the quinoa in a fine sieve and rinse under cold running water for about 30 seconds, rubbing it with your fingers. A normal sieve is too coarse: the seeds slip through.
2. **Toast (optional).** For a nuttier taste, stir the drained quinoa in the dry pan, or with a little oil, over medium heat for 2–3 minutes until it smells toasty.
3. **Add water and salt.** Add 2 cups of water or stock and a pinch of salt. Bring to a boil.
4. **Simmer, covered.** Turn the heat to low, put the lid on and simmer for 15 minutes, until the water is absorbed. Don't stir.
5. **Rest.** Take the pan off the heat and leave the lid on for 5–10 minutes. This is the step that makes it fluffy: the steam finishes cooking the grains.
6. **Fluff.** Fluff with a fork and season.

Rice cooker and pressure cooker

Rice cooker: rinse the quinoa, add 2 cups of water per cup, and use the white rice setting. Leave it on "keep warm" for 10 minutes before opening.

Pressure cooker or Instant Pot: rinse, then add 1¼ cups of water per cup of quinoa. Cook for 1 minute at high pressure and let the pressure release naturally for 10 minutes. Very little water evaporates, so the full 1 : 2 ratio would make it soggy.

Fixes for common problems

- **Bitter or soapy:** it wasn't rinsed. Next time rinse longer, in a fine sieve.
- **Mushy:** too much water, or no resting time. Use a little less water and let it stand covered.

- **Crunchy or still wet at the bottom:** the lid wasn't tight or the heat was too high. Add 2–3 tablespoons of water, cover and leave on the lowest heat for 5 more minutes.
- **Bland:** cook it in vegetable stock, add a bay leaf or garlic clove, and season after fluffing with lemon juice, olive oil and herbs.

Quinoa nutrition

Quinoa is a seed, cooked and eaten like a whole grain. One cooked cup (185 g) has about **8 g of protein**, **5 g of fibre** and 220 kcal, plus magnesium, iron, folate and manganese, according to USDA data. It's also one of few plant foods that's a **complete protein**, with all nine essential amino acids. More in how much protein is in quinoa. For more protein ideas, see high-protein vegan meals, or work out your own target with the protein calculator.

Ways to use cooked quinoa

- **Grain bowls:** quinoa, roasted vegetables, chickpeas or tofu, and a tahini or peanut dressing.
- **Salads:** it holds its shape, so it works in salads for several days. Try it in our black bean and avocado salad or roasted eggplant and chickpea salad.
- **Breakfast:** simmer it in plant milk with cinnamon and top with fruit and nuts, like porridge.
- **Instead of rice:** under a curry such as our chickpea curry or red lentil curry.
- **Stuffed vegetables and burgers:** mix with beans and spices to stuff peppers or shape into patties.

Storing and meal prep

Cook a big batch: spread the quinoa on a tray to cool quickly, then keep it in a closed container in the fridge for **4–5 days** or the freezer for **2–3 months**, in portions. Reheat with a splash of water, or eat cold in salads. It's one of the easiest building blocks for vegan meal prep.

Frequently asked questions

What is the ratio of water to quinoa? +

Do you have to rinse quinoa? +

Why is my quinoa mushy? +

How do you know when quinoa is cooked? +

Is quinoa a complete protein? +

Is quinoa gluten-free? +

How long does cooked quinoa last? +

This guide is general information for healthy adults, not medical advice. Talk to your doctor or a dietitian before starting or changing supplements, especially if you're pregnant, breastfeeding or have a health condition.

Sources

- USDA FoodData Central: quinoa, cooked and uncooked (fdc.nal.usda.gov)
- USDA FoodKeeper: storage times for cooked grains (foodsafety.gov)
- Whole Grains Council: quinoa (wholegrainscouncil.org)

From vegochef.com: meal planner and nutrition tracker for vegans, vegetarians and pescatarians. Free for 7 days on the App Store.