



How to Make Brown Rice Onigiri: A Visual Guide

By Darshana Thacker Wendel
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When I first encountered onigiri a few years ago, I immediately fell in love with the classic Japanese rice ball snacks. They are traditionally made with white rice, which is naturally sticky and holds the onigiri's triangular, spherical, or cylindrical form. As a [whole-food, plant-based](#) chef, I was happy to find that brown rice works well, too. The trick is to press the rice together and then let the onigiri sit awhile before serving it. Here's a step-by-step guide to vegan onigiri made with brown rice—including [photos](#) that break down the assembly process and a [recipe for my favorite filling](#)—so you can make and enjoy your own brown rice onigiri at home!

1. Gather Ingredients

Here's everything you'll need to make 8 brown rice onigiri.

Ingredients

- ½ cup of filling(s) of your choice, such as pickled plum, shelled edamame, and/or Ginger Eggplant ([recipe below](#))
- 1 cup uncooked short-grain brown rice
- 1¾ cups vegetable stock

- 1½ teaspoons arrowroot powder
- 1 nori wrap, cut into eight 1-inch thick strips
- Black or white sesame seeds, toasted
- Sea kelp granules for garnish (optional)
- Togarashi spice for garnish (optional)

Materials

- Large saucepan or rice cooker
- Small bowl
- Plastic wrap
- Cutting board

Make the Rice

To make the rice, combine the rice and stock in a large saucepan; bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low. Cover pan, and gently simmer for about 40 minutes, until rice is tender and the stock is cooked off. (Or use a rice cooker, to cook rice on brown rice setting until tender and stock is cooked off.)

In a small bowl, combine the arrowroot with ½ cup of water. Stir arrowroot mixture into rice. Mix well. Let stand for 10 minutes.

Prepare the Assembly Station

Prepare a station to assemble the onigiri with plastic wrap, a cutting board, rice, nori strips, vegetable filling, sesame seeds, and garnishes (if using).

Assemble Onigiri

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1. Place an 8-inch square sheet of plastic wrap on the cutting board; place $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of rice in the center. Lift one end of the plastic to cover the rice and press down with your palm to flatten it, compacting the grains as tightly as possible.



2. Place about 2 tablespoons of filling in the center.



3. With the help of the plastic wrap, fold the edges of the rice over the center to cover the filling and form a ball. Twist the plastic to tighten and pack the rice around the filling.

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4. Gently shape the rice into a triangle. Remove the plastic, and sprinkle sesame seeds on top. Repeat Steps 1–4 with remaining rice and filling to form 8 onigiri.



5. To help rice stick together better, let onigiri sit at room temperature for 1 hour. Just before serving, wrap a nori strip around each onigiri.



6. Garnish with kelp and togarashi (if using).

Ginger Eggplant Onigiri Filling

Onigiri typically feature a flavorful filling. Some vegetarian filling options include pickled plums (umeboshi) or other pickles, shelled edamame, and mashed avocado. For an extra-special vegan onigiri, I take a few extra minutes to prepare this satisfying filling, sautéing bell pepper and Japanese eggplant in aromatics until perfectly tender. Here's how.

- 1 small onion, cut into ¼-inch dice (1 cup)
- 1 red bell pepper, peeled and cut into ½-inch dice (1 cup)
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 Japanese eggplants, peeled and cut into ½-inch dice (3 cups)
- 1½ tablespoons reduced-sodium tamari
- 1½ teaspoons brown rice vinegar

1. In a large sauté pan combine the onion, bell pepper, ginger, and garlic; sauté over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring frequently, until the onion turns translucent.
2. Add eggplant, tamari, and vinegar, and cook 10 minutes more, or until eggplant is tender and the water from the vegetables has cooked off. Remove from heat and set aside.