

Sushi served at Home

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According to sushi chef Sergio Verduzco, owner of East By Southwest, a Durango restaurant and sushi bar, almost anyone, with a few basic tools and a little practice, can make their own sushi at home. The key, according to Verduzco, is preparation.

Jennifer and Chris Lyman, of Durango, have enjoyed sushi in restaurants for years. They were inspired to try making it at home when they saw sushi kits for sale at City Market.

"We thought we could just buy the kit and a few ingredients and make sushi for dinner that night," Mrs. Lyman said. "It was almost midnight by the time we ate." Preparing the rice was the most time-consuming step, she said.

It's good to know a thing or two about sushi before attempting to make your own, Mr. Lyman said. "If you've never tried it, go to a restaurant and see if you like it before you invest in the stuff," he said.

Researching recipes and ingredients in advance is also a good idea, Mr. Lyman said. "The outside of the kit doesn't tell you what other things you'll need besides what's included in the kit," he said. "If it's an impulse-buy, you'll be disappointed when you get home."

According to Verduzco, utensils and tools you'll need to have on hand are a sharp knife, a bamboo mat, a bowl of water to dampen your hands, a wooden cutting board and a damp towel to wipe your knife and hands. A wooden mixing bowl and spoon are also useful for preparing the rice.

Bamboo mats cost about \$3 to \$6 each and can be purchased at most specialty markets, including Grandma Chung's and Sunnyside Farms. Verduzco recommends covering the mat with plastic wrap to keep rice from sticking to it.

The basic ingredients you'll need are sushi rice, rice vinegar, nori (flat sheets of roasted seaweed used as wrappers), wasabe (a green paste made from Japanese horseradish), pickled ginger and soy sauce, plus fresh seafood and vegetables.

The basics can be found at most grocery stores and specialty markets. Sunnyside



Farms sells nori in packages of 10 sheets for \$2.99, and City Market and Grandma Chung's sell packages of 50 sheets for \$13.99. Wasabi comes as a paste in a tube, or as a powder to be mixed with water.

Ingredients and utensils can also be ordered online at Web sites such as www.asianwok.com, www.asiafoods.com and www.pacificrim-gourmet.com.

Select seafood carefully

Almost any kind of fresh or frozen sushi-grade fish can be ordered online and shipped directly to your door from Web sites such as www.sushifoods.com or by calling (888) 81-SUSHI.

Most local seafood markets usually have at least one type of sushi-grade fish on hand. Many, including Albertsons and Sunnyside Farms, will special-order almost anything that swims.

The best way to ensure that fish is safe is to buy good quality fish, then freeze it for three days before using it, according to local fishmonger Scott Macy, of City Market. Freezing kills bacteria and parasites.

"One of the biggest misconceived notions is that you can take fish fresh off a boat and eat it," Macy said. Most of the fish at City Market has been frozen at some point.

According to the Web site of the Food and Drug Administration, fish that is safe to eat should have virtually no odor. It's only when seafood starts to decompose that it gets a "fishy" smell.

Always find out what days fish is delivered to your market, Macy advises, and purchase fish for sushi the same day it's delivered. Fish is delivered to City Market on Mondays and Thursdays.

Once you've gathered everything you need, the next step is to make the rice:

Sushi Rice

2 cups short-grain sushi rice	2 tablespoon sugar
2 cups water	1 teaspoon salt
1/8 cup seasoned rice vinegar	

Rinse the rice with water until the water runs clear. Spread rinsed rice on a plate and allow to dry for about one hour.

Verduzco highly recommends cooking the rice in a rice cooker, since rice can be difficult, particularly at high altitude. Grandma Chung's sells rice cookers, as do most stores that carry kitchen appliances.

The other option is to use a heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid. If using a pot, add rice and water, cover tightly and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, at low



temperature for about 20 minutes. Remove from heat. Do not remove the cover, even for a second.

Let rice stand, tightly covered, for 20 minutes, then transfer to a wooden bowl. Use a wooden spoon or spatula to break up chunks of rice to allow steam to escape and stop the cooking process.

In a small bowl or glass measuring cup, dissolve the salt and sugar in the rice vinegar. Drizzle over the rice, then use a wooden spoon to toss and mix the rice thoroughly, breaking up any chunks and ensuring that all rice is evenly coated with vinegar solution.

Cover the bowl with a damp cloth and allow to sit at room temperature until you're ready to use it. Do not refrigerate rice, Verduzco said. The vinegar acts as a preservative, so rice will not spoil, even if left out for several hours.

When the rice is done, Verduzco said, you're ready to roll.

Rolling sushi

Rolled sushi is called maki and comes in several types. The two most common types are regular maki, with nori on the outside and rice and ingredients inside, and inside-out maki, with rice on the outside.

The cool thing about making sushi, according to Verduzco, is that the same technique is used for all rolls. The only thing that changes is the ingredients, which can be almost anything.

The following are inside-out rolls:

California Roll

Nori	Cucumber
Sushi rice	Sesame seeds (toasted)
Crab or crab stick	Masago or fish roe (optional)
Avocado	

Spicy Tuna Roll

Nori	Spicy tuna mixture (8 ounces raw ahi tuna,
Sushi rice	1/4 cup minced scallions, 1 tablespoon
Cucumber	toasted sesame seeds, pinch salt, 1/2 ounce
Daikon radish (a large, Japanese radish)	sriracha hot chili sauce, 1/4 ounce sesame oil.
Avocado (optional)	Mince tuna with a sharp knife, then blend all
	ingredients together in a bowl.)

them. "It's very important to keep your hands wet," Verduzco said. "They should be damp but not dripping."

Nori has a shiny side and a rough side. Rice is always layered on the rough side. Fold each piece in half and tear in two. Use half a sheet for each roll. Place the half-sheet horizontally in front of you on the cutting board, with the shiny side down.

For each roll, use a ball of rice about the size of a tennis ball, about 4 to 5 ounces. Shape it into a cylinder and place it horizontally across the center of the nori sheet, always on the rough side (fig. 1).

Gently spread the rice to the edges of the nori (fig. 2).

For a California Roll, sprinkle roasted sesame seeds on the rice (fig. 3). If desired, use a small knife to spread a thin layer of masago (fish roe) on top of the rice (fig. 4).

Easy does it

Cover with the bamboo mat and *very lightly* press seeds and/or masago into the rice.

According to Verduzco, one of the biggest mistakes beginners make is to press down too hard, compacting the rice and fillings too tightly. When you bite into a piece of sushi, the individual grains of rice should crumble in your mouth, Verduzco explained. If a roll is packed too tightly, it will have a chewy consistency.

Flip the sheet of nori over so it is rice-side down (fig. 5).

Next, add one ounce of crab (California Roll) or spicy tuna mix (Spicy Tuna Roll) in a row across the center of the nori sheet (fig. 6). Cut the cucumber and/or avocado into long, thin slices and place alongside crab or fish. Leave the ends of a few cucumber slices sticking out the ends of the roll for visual effect.

"Some people like to leave the skin on the cucumber because it adds more color to the roll," Verduzco said. Hothouse cucumbers are best because they aren't waxed. If the skin of the cucumber is waxed, it should be rubbed with a warm, damp cloth to remove the wax before slicing.

Lift the nori edge closest to you and place your thumbs behind it (fig. 7). Grasp the far edge with your fingers, curl it toward you and join the edges in the shape of a roll (fig. 8). Turn it about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a turn, then place the bamboo mat over it and press lightly.

Lightly press just the rice into the ends of the roll, leaving the cucumber slices sticking out each end (fig. 9). "It creates a nice visual effect," Verduzco said.

Wet a sharp knife and run it underneath the roll from one end to the other, to separate it from the cutting board.

Cut the roll in half, then place the halves next to each other and slice them again at the center. Cut each piece in half again to make a total of eight pieces (fig. 10).

"Any very sharp, thin knife will do," Verduzco said. "It doesn't have to be a sushi knife."

Presentation and dipping sauces

For presentation, Verduzco, who said he prefers white plates, places a bamboo leaf on each plate then arranges the slices on it. "You can decorate with any type of leaf you like," he said.

Place a small ball of wasabi and a pinch of pickled ginger on each plate. Both are readily available in most local grocery stores, according to Verduzco.

In a small side dish, mix soy sauce with a tiny bit of wasabi and use as a dipping sauce. Sushi is finger-food. Pick up a piece, dip it in soy sauce and eat it in one bite.

Eat bites of pickled ginger between sushi to refresh your mouth.

Veggie Roll

Cucumber

Pencil asparagus (blanched)

Sprouts (preferably daikon sprouts, but any kind will work)

Inari tofu

Pickled daikon

Carrot

Egg omelet, sliced thinly (if you don't want to make the omelet, just use pieces of scrambled egg)

Avocado

Sweet soy sauce (also called kecap manis or kecap manis, available online)

Veggie Rolls are futomaki, or "big rolls." These are rolled regular-style, with rice inside and the nori on the outside. Position the half-sheet of nori vertically on the cutting board, rather than horizontally as in regular maki.

When layering the rice, leave about an inch of space at the top of the nori. Veggies should be "baton cut," like thin french fries. Leave the nori rice-side up and arrange slices of omelet and vegetables in horizontal rows across the center of the rice.

Allow the tips of the asparagus to stick out each end of the roll for visual effect.

Using the same technique as above, lift the nori edge closest to you and place your thumbs behind it. Grasp the far edge with your fingers, curl it toward you and join the edges in the shape of a roll. The rice at the edges should stick together, and the extra inch of nori should overlap on the outside and hold the roll together.

Turn it about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a turn, then place the bamboo mat over it and press lightly.

Slice the futomaki in six slices (instead of eight).

Arrange on a plate, then drizzle with sweet soy sauce.

[Back to East by Southwest](#)