

Hambagu, the OG Loco Moco

Serves 4 | 45 minutes prep + 90 minutes cook time

The origin story behind the Hawaiian classic loco moco involves a handful of teenagers asking for a cheap lunch at a snack shop on Hilo just after WWII. The cook put a hamburger patty on a bowl of rice, topped it with gravy, and the kids named it after one of their friends who liked to do “crazy” stuff.

But the original loco moco - without the fried egg, which, by most accounts, came later - is strikingly similar to Japanese hambagu, a classic dish in the yoshoku tradition of western foods adapted to Japanese palates. Yoshoku dishes date back to the late 1800s, but became more popular in the 1920s and '30s.

No matter where it comes from, a well-seasoned burger on a bowl of rice topped with a tasty gravy is delicious. This version, inspired by loco moco, gets even more flavor with a sauce using an inauthentic mix of traditional Japanese ingredients.

¾ cup naked barley

¾ cup Koda Farms brown rice

1 teaspoon sea salt + more to taste

Appx 3 quarts water

1 onion, chopped

1 tablespoon Jorinji red miso

1 teaspoon Sonoko curry powder

1 tablespoon ketchup

1 tablespoons Nitto Jyozo white tamari

2 tablespoons flour

2 cups Kuze Fuku Instant Dashi

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided

½ lb ground beef *

½ cup bread crumbs or panko

¼ cup milk

1 egg + 1 more egg per serving if going loco moco

* Use ground beef that's at least 20% fat because it tastes better. You can also combine ground beef and pork.

Brown Rice and Naked Barley Mugi Gohan Step 1 Bring the water to a boil, stir in 1 teaspoon salt, and add the barley. Cook uncovered at an active boil for 10 minutes, then add the rice.

Step 2 Continue to cook uncovered at an active boil for another 35 minutes. Drain by slowly pouring off the water (or use a colander), fluff with a fork, cover, and rest for at least 10 minutes.

Miso Curry Onion Gravy Step 1 Make the dashi according to the directions on the package. Cook the onion in 1 tablespoon olive oil with a pinch of sea salt until soft and lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Set aside half for the Hambagu.

Step 2 Add an additional tablespoon of olive oil to the skillet then stir in the curry powder. Cook for a minute or so, then add the flour and cook for a few minutes.

Step 3 Add the miso, ketchup, and tamari, stir to combine, then add the dashi. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer for 5 minutes or until thick. Taste and add salt if needed.

Hambagu Step 1 Preheat the oven to warm.

Step 2 Soak the breadcrumbs in the milk for 10 minutes.

Step 3 Combine the cooked onion, soaked breadcrumbs, ground beef, and egg. Add a few pinches of sea salt and mix well.

Step 4 Form into 4 patties about 3 inches in diameter. Heat a skillet, add a tablespoon or so of olive oil, and cook the patties over medium heat lightly browned on both sides.

Step 5 Keep the patties warm the oven while you deglaze the skillet with a quarter cup or so of water, then stir in the gravy.

Step 6 To serve, spread about a cup of the rice-barley mix on a plate. Place the meat patty on top, add some gravy, and if desired, top it all with fried egg. Sprinkle a pinch or two of togarashi or salty black sesame (or both) over everything.