Prep time: 20 minutes
Cook time: 20 minutes (rice)
Cooling time: 20 minutes
Total time: 1 hour
Intensity: Moderate (requires a bamboo mat and a light hand; beginner-friendly)

Table of Contents

- Ingredients
- Equipment
- Instructions
    - Step 1 — Cook the rice (20 minutes | Intensity: Low)
    - Step 2 — Season the rice (5 minutes | Intensity: Low)
    - Step 3 — Prep the fillings (10 minutes | Intensity: Low)
    - Step 4 — Set up the rolling station (3 minutes | Intensity: Low)
    - Step 5 — Spread the rice (4 minutes | Intensity: Medium)
    - Step 6 — Flip and fill (3 minutes | Intensity: Medium)
    - Step 7 — Roll (3 minutes | Intensity: Medium-High)
    - Step 8 — Slice and serve (3 minutes | Intensity: Medium)
- Chef’s Notes & Troubleshooting
- Nutrition (per serving — 1 of 4, about 4 pieces)

Ingredients

For the sushi rice:

- 1 cup short-grain sushi rice

- 1¼ cups cold water
- 2 tbsp rice vinegar
- 1 tbsp granulated sugar
- ½ tsp fine sea salt

For the filling:

- 8 oz (225 g) imitation crab (surimi), shredded or cut into thin strips
- 1 ripe avocado, sliced into ¼-inch strips
- 1 small cucumber (Persian or English), cut into thin matchsticks
- 2 tbsp Japanese mayonnaise (Kewpie) or regular mayo
- 1 tsp sriracha (optional)

For rolling:

- 2 sheets nori (toasted seaweed), full-size

- ¼ cup toasted sesame seeds (white and black mixed)
- 1 tbsp rice vinegar mixed with ½ cup water (for wetting hands)

For serving:

- Soy sauce
- Wasabi paste
- Pickled ginger
- Extra Japanese mayo and sriracha

Equipment

- Bamboo sushi mat (makisu), wrapped in plastic wrap
- Rice cooker or saucepan with tight lid
- Wooden or glass bowl (not metal) for cooling rice

- Rice paddle or spatula
- Sharp chef’s knife
- Small bowl of vinegared water
- Plastic wrap

Instructions

Step 1 — Cook the rice (20 minutes | Intensity: Low)

Rinse the sushi rice in a bowl of cold water, swirling gently, until the water runs nearly clear — 3–4 rinses. Drain well. Combine the rice and 1¼ cups cold water in the saucepan, bring to a boil over high heat (about 400°F / 205°C), then immediately reduce to low (about 200°F / 93°C), cover, and cook 15 minutes without lifting the lid. Remove from heat and rest, covered, 10 minutes. Do not stir while cooking — stirring makes the rice gluey.

Step 2 — Season the rice (5 minutes | Intensity: Low)

While the rice cooks, warm the rice vinegar, sugar, and salt in a small saucepan over low heat just until dissolved — do not boil. Transfer the hot rice to the wooden bowl and pour the vinegar mixture over it. Using the paddle, gently fold and cut through the rice to coat every grain, then fan it 5–8 minutes until it reaches room temperature. Don’t mash it — cutting motion keeps the grains intact.

Step 3 — Prep the fillings (10 minutes | Intensity: Low)

Shred the imitation crab into bite-sized pieces and toss with the Japanese mayo and sriracha, if using. Slice the avocado into ¼-inch strips (a squeeze of lemon keeps it from browning) and cut the cucumber into thin matchsticks. Keep all fillings within about 6 inches long so they fit the roll evenly.

Step 4 — Set up the rolling station (3 minutes | Intensity: Low)

Wrap the bamboo mat tightly in plastic wrap — this keeps rice from sticking and makes cleanup easy. Place a nori sheet shiny-side down on the mat. Fill the small bowl with the vinegared water. Keep a damp towel nearby for your hands and knife.

Step 5 — Spread the rice (4 minutes | Intensity: Medium)

Wet your hands in the vinegared water and shake off excess. Grab a tennis-ball-sized portion of rice (about ¾ cup) and gently spread it over the nori in an even layer, leaving a ½-inch border at the top edge. Don’t press hard — a light touch keeps the rice fluffy. Sprinkle 1 tbsp sesame seeds evenly over the rice.

Step 6 — Flip and fill (3 minutes | Intensity: Medium)

Place a sheet of plastic wrap over the rice, then place your hand under the mat and flip the whole thing so the nori faces up. Carefully peel off the mat and plastic. Arrange half the crab, half the avocado, and half the cucumber in a horizontal line across the lower third of the nori. Keep the filling compact and centered — overfilling is the number one cause of blowouts.

Step 7 — Roll (3 minutes | Intensity: Medium-High)

Lift the edge of the mat closest to you and fold it over the filling, tucking the nori tightly against the filling with your fingers. Roll forward, pulling the mat away as you go, pressing gently to shape. Don’t roll the plastic into the sushi. Wet the bare top border of nori with a fingertip to seal the seam. Repeat with the second roll.

Step 8 — Slice and serve (3 minutes | Intensity: Medium)

Wipe the knife with a damp cloth, then slice each roll in half. Wipe the blade again, then cut each half into 4 pieces — a wet, sharp knife prevents tearing. Arrange on a plate and serve with soy sauce, wasabi, pickled ginger, and extra spicy mayo.

Chef’s Notes & Troubleshooting

- Rice too sticky or mushy? Rinse more thoroughly, don’t stir during cooking, and use slightly less water if your rice cooker runs wet.
- Roll falling apart? The rice layer was too thick or the filling too wet. Drain cucumber matchsticks on paper towels for 5 minutes first.
- Nori cracked? The sheet absorbed moisture from the rice — work quickly and keep unused nori sealed.
- Blowouts when slicing? Use a very sharp knife, wipe it between cuts, and slice with a gentle sawing motion rather than pressing down.
- Make it spicy: Mix 2 tbsp mayo with 1 tsp sriracha for a spicy crab filling, or add a thin jalapeño strip.
- No bamboo mat? Use a clean folded kitchen towel wrapped in plastic — it works in a pinch.

- Make-ahead: Cook and season rice up to 4 hours ahead; keep covered at room temperature. Rolls are best eaten fresh the same day.

Nutrition (per serving — 1 of 4, about 4 pieces)

Nutrient	Amount
Calories	~330 kcal
Protein	10 g
Total Fat	10 g
— Saturated Fat	1.5 g
Carbohydrates	50 g
— Fiber	3 g
— Sugars	4 g
Cholesterol	10 mg
Sodium	~620 mg