

Rice Dream® Non-Dairy Frozen Dessert Quarts (Vegan, Gluten-Free, Soy-Free)

After sampling three flavors of Rice Dream's "ice cream" in pint form, we upgraded to the quarts. With eight servings (okay, maybe six with us) per package, we ensured that no one be left without a bowl of frozen goodness. On tap were what I like to call baseline flavors. Cocoa Marble Fudge (a.k.a. chocolate), Vanilla, Cookies & Cream and Neapolitan kept everyone in their comfort zone.

Surprisingly, the opinions were all over the board. One taster proclaimed Rice Dream as excellent, while another dropped out after a small taste of each, saying he just wasn't a fan of the underlying flavor. The rest of us fell somewhere in between...Cocoa Marble Fudge

Unlike some of the other Rice Dream flavors we had trialled, my ice cream scoop glided with ease through what appeared to be a relatively soft texture. I was finally able to serve up those picture perfect round balls of "ice cream" that I had been striving for.

With my first spoonful I did confirm that this version was a bit smoother than the other varieties. It still retained more of an ice milk feel, but it exuded a silkier more fluid behavior. Then it struck me. The flavor, the texture, it was all so familiar. De ja vu hit, I knew that I had experienced this somewhere before. Of course, it was so evident, how could I have missed it? It was a fudgesicle! If someone took a fudgesicle and packed it into an ice cream container, this would be it! From the kid-friendly chocolate flavor, right down to the dense, yet refreshing consistency, there was no other way to describe it than fudgesicle. I turned to the others and announced my discovery. They each concurred that it did have that fudgesicle essence.

It took a few bites before I noticed, but the occasional ribbon of fudge was intertwined within. More childhood flashbacks hit, as I noted the Hershey-like quality of this thick chocolate syrup. It was a nice addition. As we reminisced, it was agreed that these chocolate flavors did tend to meld best with the rice-based backdrop. Of the quart flavors, Cocoa Marble Fudge was the hands down favorite of every taste tester. Cookies n Dream

Sliding easily into second place, this was an obvious take on the old favorite, cookies & cream. Density-wise this one wasn't quite as forgiving as the Chocolate, but with a few minutes on the counter to soften, I was able to spoon out large chunks for a more familiar bowl of ice cream look.

The Cookies n Dream was more hard-packed than your average creamy "ice cream," but it maintained that basic milky flavor I had come to recognize with Rice Dream. The texture was once again more along the lines of an ice milk, but it melted easily as it struck my tongue and exuded a creamier presence. I didn't notice any particular notes of vanilla or other enhancements, but rather a pleasantly mild cookie-like background.

The cookies were a definite highlight in this variety. The soft chocolaty chunks were greatly enjoyed and helped to break up the fairly neutral background. Though it didn't wow our tasters, the Cookies & Cream was enjoyed, and categorized as a good standard "ice cream" for birthday parties or a casual treat. Neapolitan

We were each a bit surprised when I opened a package of the Neapolitan. Rather than separated patches of strawberry, vanilla, and chocolate, Rice Dream created an almost artistic picture with each flavor intertwined in a swirling fashion.

I noticed immediately that the Neapolitan was more hard packed than some of the softer Rice Dream flavors. To taste, it was a bit "chunky" in texture, melting into a very frosty milk on the tongues of those who were patient.

At first, this one didn't capture much attention. It appeared to be simply chocolate and vanilla. However, thanks to a lack of fake food coloring, the strawberry flavor hid along one side with just a faintly pink color. Once we added a strawberry filled scoop to each bowl, a little more interest developed. Not enough to propel it past the Chocolate Marble Fudge, but enough to elicit some "not bads" from our group.

Still, the flavors didn't work in unison as much as hoped. Inevitably, each spoonful was a blend of two to three flavors, yet they didn't seem to meld well. Some of the bitter aftertaste that was noticed in a couple of the Rice Dream pints seemed to re-emerge in the Neapolitan. Only our proclaimed "bitter-taster" enjoyed this selection. Vanilla

I am a true vanillaholic. Needless to say, for myself, this flavor was a true test of product quality. As I began to fill our bowls, all signs pointed to an excellent product. Like the Chocolate Marble Fudge, the Vanilla was creamier in texture. My scoop slid with ease into the milky white ice "cream."

The texture did in fact lean more toward the silkiness of true ice cream when compared with some of the other Rice Dream flavors. As for the flavor, I felt it was okay. Though this was obviously vanilla, it reminded me more of a childhood vanilla rather than the rich vanilla bean flavors that have emerged in recent years. It was quite mellow, and it failed to hit my taste buds with that smooth vanilla perfection.

That being said, this neutral flavor would work quite well for any a la mode application. It melted easily into a thick creamy milk, almost inviting a warm apple crisp. There was that slight bitter aftertaste, which no doubt made this choice one of our "bitter" taster's favorites. In his vote, the vanilla moved into a tie with the Cocoa Marble Fudge.

For the rest of us, it was good ... standard really. Personally, due to its attractive price point and soy-free nature, I would consider picking some up some Vanilla Rice Dream this berry season, as fruit spiked desserts beckon me into the kitchen.

My Extra Notes & Tips:

- I am a vanilla addict, but I must confess that the richer chocolate and carob flavors do seem to work best with Rice Dream's brown rice base. We each noted that either the rice milk or brown rice syrup seems to have a flavor of its own. While some of the lighter flavors were unable to hold their own against this backdrop, the chocolate and carob seemed to stand out.
- Keep an eye out for Rice Dream in store flyers. Though it is attractively priced when compared to both non-dairy and specialty ice creams, it isn't uncommon to see a sale come along.
- For this trial we solicited some dairy-consumers as well. Surprisingly, they were the ones who enjoyed this brand the most.
- Of the above flavors, all but the Cookies n Dream are gluten-free and vegan. I can't tell from looking at the ingredients why the Cookies n Dream isn't vegan, so you may want to contact Hain Celestial directly if concerned. Also, all flavors noted are soy-free. A true rarity on the non-dairy frozen dessert market. See the Taste the Dream website for ingredients and other flavors.

Where to Purchase: At present Rice Dream Frozen Dessert is only available within the U.S., but it is widely distributed. I have even spotted Rice Dream at my local large grocery chain. See the Taste The Dream Website for a store locator.