

❧ PERSIAN STEAMED WHITE RICE ❧

Chelo

Many people become extremely intimidated when it comes to making Persian rice. You have to trust me when I tell you it is really not a big deal—just don't tell anyone Persian I said that! All you need to do is to imagine that instead of making rice, you are making pasta. Most of us know how to make pasta; it is probably what you ate every day when you went to college! You are going to cook this rice in boiling water with oil and salt, just like pasta. You are going to wait until the rice is "al dente" (when you bite a grain of rice it should still have a white dot in the middle), just like pasta. Do not overcook Persian rice or your reputation as a Persian cook will suffer! And last, you are going to drain it, just like pasta.

The difference comes next: Persian rice has one cooking step that pasta doesn't have. Persian rice gets steamed. Think of it this way: since this rice is fancy, it requires a "spa treatment." What is the result when you pamper yourself at the sauna? A new you! What is the result when you treat your rice to a "spa treatment"? Each and every grain of rice becomes its own entity and a pearl from heaven! What is the best after-effect of a "spa treatment" for a woman? It makes her a better wife, a better mother—and a better cook! What is the best after-effect of a "spa treatment" for Persian rice? The most scrumptious, crunchy, golden crust: *TADIG*!

To make this rice you will need a colander—and the smaller the openings, the better. You don't want your precious rice to slip out! Also, many Persian cooks wash and soak the rice as if it were dirty laundry...I am sorry, I keep my laundry in the basement and I don't have time for all that soaking, so trust me when I tell you that you don't need to do it!

The quantities in the recipe below might seem large, but considering that Persians breathe rice, it goes really fast. **If you want to make a smaller quantity, try only 3 cups rice, 8 cups water, ¼ cup oil, and 1 tablespoon salt.** Also, any basmati rice will do. Basmati rice is also available in whole-grain brown; although it is a little stickier, it is absolutely delicious and healthful! Visit my website for a video of this recipe.

Part 1:

COOKING THE RICE

5 cups basmati rice, checked and rinsed
12 cups water
½ cup canola oil
3 tablespoons salt

Part 2:

STEAMING THE RICE AND MAKING TADIG

¼-inch canola oil poured into the bottom of the saucepan
2 tablespoons water
¼ teaspoon turmeric or powdered saffron (optional, for a more authentic flavor)





TO COOK THE RICE

1. Fill a large nonstick saucepan (at least 6 quarts) with 12 cups water; add oil and salt. Cover and bring to a brisk boil over high heat.
2. Add the rice and continue cooking over medium to high heat, stirring occasionally.
3. After 3–5 minutes, use a slotted spoon to scoop some grains from the water. Break one grain in half to make sure it is “al dente” (see above). Turn off the heat and pour rice into the colander to drain; set aside.

TO STEAM AND MAKE TADIG

1. Place the empty 6-quart saucepan back onto the stovetop over medium heat. Add ¼-inch canola oil and 2 tablespoons water. Add turmeric and/or saffron powder. Stir together.
2. Add the drained rice and shape it into a pyramid. Cover the pot and cook for 5–7 minutes until rice begins to steam.

3. Uncover and place 2 paper towels (one on top of the other) over the rice. The ends will extend outside the pot. Replace the lid tightly.
4. Reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, for 45 minutes. Turn off the heat and tilt the lid until ready to serve.
5. With a wide spatula, scoop the rice from the pot, making sure not to disturb the crust (*tadig*) that formed on the bottom of the pot. Serve the rice on a flat serving platter, mounding it into the shape of a pyramid. Turn the *tadig* out onto a flat serving platter by inverting the pot, as you would invert a cake pan, or cut it into pieces and serve around the rice.

Yield: 8 servings

Optional garnish:

SAFFRON RICE

1. To make saffron water, mix together 1 teaspoon crushed saffron threads and ¼ cup hot water. Steep for a few minutes, until the water becomes yellow.
2. Mix saffron water with steamed white rice. Use this intensely yellow rice to make designs on the Chelo.

Yield: Up to 8 servings, depending on whether your guests are Persian!

To reheat this rice:

Pour ½ cup water mixed with ¼ cup canola oil onto the pyramid in a large pot. You can also freeze this rice, as long as you do not stir it until it is completely defrosted. You can even cook it, freeze it, and later steam it as it defrosts. I know I will have to spend time in “rice hell” for admitting to freezing Persian rice, but it is worth it to make my life easier!

Tricks of the Trade

Chelo cooks very quickly. Therefore, when I make *Chelo*, I always make sure to have a colander ready in the sink to drain the rice so I do not overcook it. Also, when you steam the rice by placing the paper towels between the lid and the pot, make sure these are safely away from the heat. After this rice is steamed, it is important to tilt the lid to allow any extra steam to escape so that the crunchy bottom does not become soggy.

I often cook this rice on Thursday and have it ready to steam on Friday a few hours before Shabbat.

❧ PERSIAN ROULADE ❧

This is by far the most popular dessert at my Shabbat table! It is amazing to see people's eyes when I bring it to the table—and also to witness their puzzled faces trying to figure out the unfamiliar flavor they can't decipher (rose water).

Versatility is what is great about this recipe! You can use the same cake recipe I provide you, but the fillings are endless. Since I usually serve this cake after a meat meal, I use *parve* (nondairy) whipping cream (such as Rich's Whip®). Other fun fillings are raspberry jam, Nutella® (if dairy), and even date butter. I also like to use rum or brandy mixed with a bit of water to moisten the cake if I do not have rose water handy. I promise, this will be a hit! Check out a video for this recipe at my blog, kosher-persianfoodblog.com.

Cake

- 4 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup rose water (to moisten cake)

Cream

- 1 pint *parve* whipping cream, divided
- 1 cup powdered sugar

Garnish (optional)

- powdered sugar
- 4 strawberries
- parve* whipping cream
- chocolate shavings *or* melted chocolate chips (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a 17"x12"x1" jellyroll sheet with parchment paper. Set aside.
2. Beat eggs in the bowl of a stand mixer for 1 minute or until fluffy. Add sugar and vanilla and continue beating for 3 minutes or until the mixture begins to turn pale yellow.
3. Gently and thoroughly fold in baking powder and flour with a flat spatula, making sure not to deflate the eggs. Spread batter evenly onto the prepared cookie sheet. Bake for 15 minutes or until center springs back when lightly pressed.

4. In the meantime, whip *parve* whipping cream until peaks form. Add sugar and combine. Set aside.
5. When cake is ready, hold the corners of the paper and remove from tray onto a flat surface. Peel cake off paper. Roll, 12-inch side in, along with the parchment paper. Set aside for a few minutes.
6. Unroll and use a pastry brush to moisten the top of the cake with rose water. Spread cream evenly on the cake, leaving some for garnish. Roll again.

7. Place on a platter, seam side down, and garnish with powdered sugar, melted chocolate, *parve* whipped cream, and strawberries, as desired. Refrigerate if not serving immediately.

Yield: 10 slices

Tricks of the trade

The eggs should be at room temperature so that you can whip them to maximum volume. The secret to making the parchment paper stay in the baking pan is to spray the pan with a little oil or water before lining it. Cut slits in the corners of the paper for a snug fit. This cake freezes beautifully—just wrap in parchment paper and then in foil. Also, it is important to use parchment paper and not wax paper; these are not the same product. Make sure not to overbake this cake or it will crack. You can drizzle some powdered sugar on the cake before rolling it so it doesn't stick to the parchment paper. For a cleaner look, you can cut off both ends of the cake... I'll bet you can't resist eating them!

❧ MINI MEATBALLS AND ZUCCHINI STEW ❧

خردشت می گوشت مرغی
Choroshk'e Gime ba Gorje Farangi

This is my husband's favorite stew! Of course you know that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, so I was very determined to learn this stew and make my way into his heart—and so I could get him to buy me a really nice bracelet I fell in love with at the mall! This dish can be eaten with bread or rice.

Stew

1 onion, diced
4 garlic cloves, pressed
¼ cup canola oil
1 (28-ounce) can stewed tomatoes
2 potatoes, peeled, cut into one-inch dice

2 zucchini cut into one-inch-thick slices
1 tablespoon salt
½ teaspoon saffron
2 limes, juiced, and lime wedges to garnish

Meatballs

1 pound ground beef
1 onion, ground or very finely chopped
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper

1. In a 6-quart saucepan, sauté the onion and garlic in oil until translucent. Add the stewed tomatoes with their liquid, potatoes, and zucchini; stir well. Simmer, covered, for 15 minutes.

2. In the meantime, make the meatball mix by combining all ingredients very well.

3. Uncover the saucepan and add the salt, saffron, and lime juice. Mix well. Bring back to a boil and shape meatballs 1 inch in diameter (the size of chestnuts). Gently drop onto the surface of stew, making sure not to stir it at all or they will lose their shape.

4. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. Uncover and gently stir the stew, detaching the mini meatballs from one another. Continue to cook, covered, for 20 minutes or until the meatballs are fully cooked and the vegetables are whole but tender.

Yield: 6-8 servings

Tricks of the trade

Interestingly, it happens that my mother-in-law, also known as Superwoman, shapes the mini-meatballs for this stew 2 at a time! I was very impressed and actually learned to do it too—it really cuts the time in half! Simply place two portions of meat the size of chestnuts in your left palm (if you are a righty), one in the middle of the palm and another over the middle finger. Roll both meatballs simultaneously using your right hand over your left hand as usual.

SMOKED FISH SALAD WITH CANDIED WALNUTS AND AVOCADO

This is not a Persian salad at all. But if I told you that even Persians, who totally worship their food, absolutely love this salad, would you believe me? You sure should! In fact, every single person at the table, no matter where they are from, will love it! The secret to this salad is the dressing, so you should be generous when pouring it.

By the way, you can substitute sliced grilled chicken breast for the smoked salmon or seared tuna; simply drape it over the greens. (Just in case you don't remember, "to sear" means to brown meat or fish quickly over very high heat in order to seal the juices inside.)

Salad

1 (7-ounce) bag store-bought greens
4 scallions, finely chopped
½ cup glazed walnuts (store-bought)
¼ cup dried cranberries (Craisins®)
1 (11-ounce) can mandarin oranges, drained
1 avocado, thinly sliced
8 ounces smoked salmon or tuna fillet
2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
(if using tuna fillet)

Dressing

¾ cup canola oil
½ cup sugar
½ teaspoon soy sauce
¼ cup seasoned rice wine vinegar
¼ cup toasted sesame oil
1 tablespoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon salt

Optional Garnishes

French-fried onions
narrow chow mein noodles
1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds

1. If using tuna, sear in a medium skillet in 2 tablespoons very hot toasted sesame oil, 3 minutes on each side; the middle of the fillet should remain pink. Cut into slices ¼-inch thick and set aside.
2. On a large, shallow platter, layer all the ingredients for the salad, starting with the greens and adding, in this order, onions, walnuts, cranberries, and mandarin oranges.

3. Drape the smoked salmon neatly over the top (or fan out the seared tuna slices).

4. Surround the salad with the chopped avocado.

5. Cover with plastic until ready to serve.

6. Before serving, sprinkle fish with French-fried onions or chow mein noodles, if using. Sprinkle with sesame seeds.

7. Combine the ingredients for the dressing; blend together very well to dissolve the sugar. Pour over salad and serve.

Yield: 8 cups