Main dishes / Iran

Persian Saffron Rice (Chelow)

The crown jewel of Iranian cooking — long-grain basmati that has been soaked, parboiled, and then steamed over a low flame wrapped in a cloth to create a golden, shatteringly crisp crust called tahdig at the bottom of the pot while the rice above remains separate, elongated, and perfumed with saffron.

Time 120 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Extra-long basmati rice (aged preferred)
- ☐ 10 parts Unsalted butter
- ☐ 0.5 parts Saffron threads, bloomed in 3 tbsp hot water
- ☐ 15 parts Lavash bread or thin flatbread (optional tahdig base)
- ☐ 3 parts Sea salt
- ☐ 8 parts Neutral oil (for tahdig)
- ☐ 5 parts Hot water (for blooming saffron)

Let's make it.

01 Rinse the basmati rice in several changes of cold water until the water runs clear — this removes surface starch that would make the cooked grains clump. Add salt to cold water (about 1 tablespoon per 2 cups rice) and soak the rinsed rice for 30–60 minutes, up to overnight in the refrigerator. Soaking allows the grain to begin absorbing water, which ensures it cooks evenly all the way through during the rapid parboil and prevents the exterior from overcooking before the center is done.

02 Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a vigorous boil — the water should taste pleasantly salty, like pasta water. Add the drained soaked rice and cook, stirring occasionally, for exactly 5–7 minutes. The rice is ready to drain when each grain has grown significantly in length and is just tender at the exterior but still has a firm, white, chalky core when bitten. The center should still have a snap. Drain immediately in a fine colander and rinse briefly with cool water to stop cooking.

03 In a wide, heavy-bottomed pot with a tight-fitting lid, heat the oil over medium heat. If using lavash, place a single layer over the oiled pot bottom, pressing to the edges. If using potato, layer thin slices over the base. Add 2 large spoonfuls of parboiled rice and spread to cover the lavash. Mound the remaining parboiled rice in a cone shape over the top — do not press or pack it. Create 5–6 holes down through the rice mound with the handle of a wooden spoon to allow steam to rise from below. Wrap the pot lid tightly in a clean kitchen cloth (this absorbs steam and prevents condensation dripping back onto the rice).

04 After 5 minutes on medium-high, reduce to absolute minimum heat (use a heat diffuser if available). Steam for 45 minutes. While the rice steams, bloom the saffron in hot water for 5 minutes, then mix with 2 tablespoons of melted butter. At the 45-minute mark, remove the lid and drizzle the saffron butter over 3–4 spoonfuls of rice in a separate bowl — stir to coat, then return this golden-orange rice to the top of the pot as a garnish. Replace lid for 5 more minutes. To serve: invert the pot onto a large round platter in one decisive motion. The tahdig should release with a satisfying thud.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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