

# Georgian Rice Salad with Eggplant & Tart Cherries

Servings: 4  
Preparation time: 30 minutes  
Cooking time: 45 minutes

2 cups basmati rice  
4 cups water  
1 tablespoon vegetable oil, butter, or ghee  
3 teaspoons salt  
4 Chinese eggplants, about 2 pounds  
4 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped  
1/2 teaspoon cayenne  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
2 teaspoons ground paprika  
1/4 cup olive oil  
1 cup pitted, dried tart cherries\*

#### SALAD DRESSING

1/2 cup sour cherry syrup\*  
2 tablespoons lime juice  
1/4 cup olive oil  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
1 cup chopped fresh scallions

#### BED OF GREENS

4 cups shredded greens, arugula or romaine lettuce

#### GARNISH

1/2 cup chopped, pistachios or toasted walnuts

#### NOTE

If you do not use Chinese eggplants, you will need 2 large eggplants—peeled, seeded and bitterness removed.\*

*Known in Greek mythology as Colchis, the land of the Golden Fleece, Georgia lies along the eastern shore of the Black Sea. The land—the Greater and Lesser Caucasus Mountains and a broad central plain—is influenced by varied climates and offers myriad produce, from the vineyards of the dry interior to the tea and lemon plantations of the subtropical coast. Georgia's position between the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea made it an important part of the Silk Road routes; this and its rich land also drew the attention of a number of conquerors, including Arabs, Mongols, Turks, and Persians, during its long history. Georgian cuisine often combines walnuts (for its nutty taste) with fruit (to counteract the oiliness of the nuts). I have adapted this wonderful rice salad from a Georgian pilaf.*

1. Pick over and wash the rice by placing it in a large container and covering it with lukewarm water. Agitate gently with your hand, then pour off the water. Repeat five times until the rice is completely clean.
2. Combine the rice with 3 cups of water, 1 tablespoon oil and 2 teaspoons salt, and bring to a boil over medium heat. Gently stir once with a wooden spoon. Cover and cook over medium heat for 20 minutes, until all the water has evaporated. Remove from heat and set aside.
3. Wash the eggplants, dice into 1/2-inch cubes and thoroughly blot dry.
4. In a large bowl, mix the garlic, cayenne, cumin, paprika and remaining salt. Add the eggplant cubes and mix well so that the spices adhere to the raw eggplants.
5. Heat 1/4 cup of olive oil in a wok or deep skillet over medium heat until very hot and fry the eggplant cubes for 10 minutes, until golden brown. Add 1 cup of water, cover and cook over low heat for another 15 minutes until tender. Remove from heat and allow to cool.
6. Combine the eggplant, cooked warm rice and tart cherries in a salad bowl and set aside.
7. To make the dressing, thoroughly mix all the salad dressing ingredients and adjust seasoning to taste. Pour over the salad, toss well, serve on a bed of greens and garnish with pistachios or walnuts.

