

Oven-Baked Rice

Makes 6 servings
Preparation time: 1 hour
40 minutes
Cooking time 2 hours

شیرازی پولو

Shirazi polow-ye qalebi

VEGETARIAN VARIATION

Eliminate the chicken from step 1 and increase the number of eggplants from 3 to 6.

NOTE

If you do not have barberries, you may replace the barberries with cranberries, dried tart cherries or grapes.

CHICKEN

1 chicken, about 2 pounds, with excess fat removed
1 large onion, peeled and thinly sliced
1 teaspoon sea salt
½ teaspoon pepper
¼ teaspoon turmeric
2 tablespoon fresh lime juice

RICE

3 cups long-grain basmati rice
3 medium seedless Japanese or Italian eggplants

½ cup oil
2 large onions, peeled and thinly sliced
1 cup dried barberries (*zereshk*),* cleaned and washed
3 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon toasted cumin seeds
2 tablespoons orange zest (3 oranges)
1 teaspoon ground saffron dissolved in ¼ cup orange blossom water
1 cup butter, ghee* or oil
3 egg yolks
2 cups plain yogurt

1. Place the chicken, onion, salt, pepper, turmeric, and lime juice in a medium-sized saucepan. Do not add water. Cover and simmer for 1 hour over low heat. Bone the chicken and cut into pieces. Set aside, reserving juices.
2. To cook the rice: Clean and wash 3 cups rice 5 times in warm water. It is then desirable but not essential to soak the rice in 8 cups water with 2 tablespoons salt for at least 2 hours.
3. Peel and cut eggplants lengthwise in ½-inch-thick slices. To remove bitterness from the eggplants, place slices in a container, cover with water, sprinkle with 1 tablespoon salt, let stand for 20 minutes, drain, and rinse with cold water. **Blot dry thoroughly.** Heat 4 tablespoons oil in a wide skillet over medium heat and brown eggplant slices. Remove eggplant and set aside. Add 2 tablespoons oil to the same skillet and brown the onions. Remove the onions from the skillet and set aside.
4. In the same skillet, heat 2 tablespoon oil, add the barberries and sugar, and stir-fry for 1 minute (beware, barberries burn easily; do not overcook). Add the cumin, orange zest, 1 tablespoon saffron water, and stir-fry for 20 seconds. Remove from heat and set aside.
5. Bring 8 cups water and 2 tablespoons salt to a boil in a large, non-stick pot. Pour the washed and drained rice into the pot. Boil briskly for 6 minutes, gently stirring twice to loosen any grains that may have stuck to the bottom. Drain rice in a large, fine-mesh colander and rinse with 2 or 3 cups water.
6. Place the oven rack in the middle. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Melt ½ cup butter in a 4-quart, Pyrex dish. Spread the butter evenly over the base and sides of the dish.
7. In a mixing bowl, whisk the egg yolks, yogurt, 2 tablespoons saffron-orange blossom water, and 4 full spatulas of the rice. Place this rice mixture in the ovenproof dish. Arrange chicken pieces on top. Spread the barberry mixture over the chicken (reserve 2 tablespoons of the barberries for the garnish). Arrange a few slices of eggplant-onion mixture on top (reserve 2 slices of eggplant for the garnish). Cover with remaining rice and **pack down** using a rubber spatula. Pour remaining butter, saffron-orange blossom water and chicken juice over the top of the rice. Cover with a layer of oiled parchment paper and a layer of aluminum

foil on top, and **press down** evenly with your hands (this will help the unmolding process later on). Seal tightly around the rim so that steam cannot escape.

8. Bake in the preheated oven for 1½ to 2 hours or until the crust is golden brown (a glass ovenproof dish allows you to see through).

9. Remove the dish from oven (**do not uncover**) and allow to cool for 15 minutes on a damp surface. Uncover and loosen the rice around the edges of the dish with the point of a knife. Place a serving platter (larger than the rice mold) on top of the dish. Hold the dish and platter firmly together and turn over in a single motion with a jolt to unmold the rice. Allow to rest for a moment, then gently lift the ovenproof dish. Garnish with the reserved eggplant slices and spoon barberries on top of the rice. Serve hot. *Nush-e Jan!*

