

Saffron-Flavored Steamed Rice with Golden Crust

Makes 6 servings

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour 20 minutes



Chelow

NOTE

In step 2, you can flavor your rice with any one of the following (or you can mix and match according to your fancy): 4 cardamom pods, 1 cinnamon stick, 2 cloves, 2 bay leaves, a few kaffir lime leaves, or a tablespoon of rose or orange blossom water. I like to mix cardamom, kaffir lime leaves, and rose water. This gives the rice a heavenly aroma and also improves the taste.

RICE

4 cups long-grain basmati rice
10 cups water
2 tablespoons sea salt
4 cardamom pods, crushed
1 tablespoon rose water

TAH-DIG

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup oil, melted butter, or ghee*
1 teaspoon ground saffron dissolved in
4 tablespoons rose water or hot water
2 tablespoons plain yogurt
1 teaspoon cumin seeds (or nigella
seeds or coriander seeds), optional

1. Pick over the rice. Basmati rice like any other old rice contains many small solid particles. This grit must be removed by picking over the rice carefully by hand. 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 5 times until the rice is completely clean. When washed rice is cooked it gives off a delightful perfume that unwashed rice does not have. *If using long-grain American or Texmati rice, it is not necessary to wash or soak the rice.* After washing the rice it is then desirable but not essential to soak it in 8 cups water with 2 tablespoons salt for 2 to 24 hours. Soaking and cooking rice with plenty of salt firms it up to support the long cooking time and prevents the rice from breaking up. The grains swell individually without sticking together. The result is a light and fluffy rice known as “the pearls of Persian cuisine.”
2. In a 5-quart, non-stick pot (11 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches diameter and 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches deep), bring 10 cups water to a boil over high heat. Add the salt, cardamom, and rose water. Pour the washed and drained rice into the pot.
3. Boil briskly over high heat for 6 to 10 minutes (depends on the kind of rice you are using), gently stirring twice with a wooden spoon to loosen any grains that may have stuck to the bottom. Bite a few grains. If the rice feels soft, and all the rice has risen to the top, it is ready.
4. Drain rice in a large, fine-mesh colander and rinse with 2 or 3 cups cold water.
5. To make golden crust (*tah-dig*): In a mixing bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, a few drops of saffron water, 2 tablespoons yogurt, 3 spatulas of rice (about 2 cups), and the cumin seeds.
6. Spread the yogurt-rice mixture over the bottom of the pot, give it a shake to even it out, and pack it down using your hands. This will help to create a tender golden crust when the rice is cooked.
7. Take one spatula full of drained rice at a time and gently place it on top of the yogurt and rice mixture, gradually shaping the rice into a pyramid. This shape leaves room for the rice to expand and enlarge.



1. WASHING



2. ADDING DRAINED RICE TO BOILING WATER



3. BRISKLY PARBOILING RICE



4. DRAINING AND RINSING RICE



5. PREPARING SAFFRON YOGURT MIX FOR THE BASE

6. SPREADING BASE FOR *TAH-DIG*

7a. PLACING RICE OVER THE BASE



7b. MOUNDING THE RICE

8. Cover and cook rice for 10 minutes over medium heat to form a golden crust.

9. Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water and pour over the rice pyramid. Drizzle the rest of the saffron water over the top. Wrap the lid with a clean dish towel and cover firmly to prevent steam from escaping. Cook for 70 minutes longer over low heat (this is for a gas flame with a heat diffuser; adjust according to your cooktop).

10. Remove the pot from heat. Allow to cool on a damp surface (I line a rimmed baking sheet with a wet dish towel) for 5 minutes without uncovering it. This helps to free the crust from the bottom of the pot.

11. There are two ways to unmold and serve the rice. The first is to hold the serving platter tightly over the uncovered pot and invert the two together, unmolding the rice onto the platter. The rice will emerge as a golden-crust cake. Serve in wedges.

12. The second way is to take 2 tablespoons of the saffron rice from the top and set aside for garnish. Gently taking one spatula full of rice at a time, place it on a serving platter without disturbing the crust. Mound the rice into a cone. Garnish with the saffron rice on top. Detach the layer of crust from the bottom using a wooden spatula. Place the pieces of crust into a small platter and serve on the side or arrange the crust around the rice platter. *Nush-e Jan!*

CHELOW COOKING TECHNIQUE FOR RESTAURANTS

Wash and boil rice for 8 to 10 minutes, drain, rinse, and spread in a sheet pan. Cover and seal with plastic wrap and keep in a cooler rack until needed. In a 5-quart pot, pour in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water and add enough rice to fill the pot, leaving a few inches on top for expansion. Whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water and swirl over the rice. Drizzle 2 tablespoons saffron-rose water on top. **Cover tightly** and steam over medium heat for 15 to 20 minutes until the rice is long and soft but not mushy.

QUICK CHELOW VARIATION

To make this *chelow* quickly without the golden crust—in step 9, instead of cooking the rice for 70 minutes, it is sufficient to cook it (steaming it) for just 15 minutes.

INDIVIDUAL RICE PORTIONS WITH GOLDEN CRUST

To make individual portions, preheat oven to 500°F (250°C) and heat a baking sheet. Using non-stick individual molds or muffin molds, place 1 tablespoon butter, 1 teaspoon water, and 1 drop of saffron water in each mold and mix with a rubber spatula until creamy. Fill each mold with parboiled rice. Place 1 tablespoon butter, 1 teaspoon water, and 1 drop of saffron water on top of each mold. Cover each mold with a layer of buttered parchment paper and aluminum foil. Press down over the foil (to help form the crust). Seal tightly all around with the aluminum foil so that no steam can escape. Place the molds on the baking sheet and bake in the oven for 50 to 55 minutes. Remove baking sheet from the oven and place on a damp surface, without uncovering molds, for 1 minute to cool. Unmold the rice by loosening the edges using a rubber spatula and turning each mold onto a plate, or on a baking sheet, kept warm, uncovered, in the oven until ready to serve.

BROWN RICE

To make *chelow* with long-grain brown basmati rice, in step 3, boil the rice for 12 to 15 minutes then proceed with the recipe as above. For *tah-dig*, use a bread crust.

REHEATING RICE

Chelow-ye do nameh—Leftover rice can be reheated and used again. Place the rice in a pot, add $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup water (depending on the amount of rice) by swirling it over the rice, cover, and cook over low heat for 15 to 20 minutes.



8. SHORT-TERM COOKING OVER MEDIUM-HIGH HEAT FOR *TAH-DIG*



9. LONG-TERM STEAMING OVER MEDIUM-LOW HEAT



10. COOLING ON A DAMP SURFACE



11. INVERTING POT ON SERVING PLATTER



A PLAIN CRUST *TAH-DIG*

RICE CRUST VARIATIONS

تهدیکساؤ

Plain Crust—For this crust, in a mixing bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, a few drops of saffron water, and 3 spatulas of the parboiled rice (about 2 cups). Spread the mixture in the bottom of the pot and mound the rest of the rice over it. In step 8 cover and cook over medium-high heat for 10 minutes. Then, in step 9 cover and cook over low heat for 70 minutes.

تهدیکسات

Yogurt Crust—In a mixing bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, a few drops of saffron water, 2 tablespoons yogurt, and 3 spatulas (about 2 cups) of the parboiled rice. Spread the mixture in the bottom of the pot and mound the rest of the rice over it. In step 8 cover and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes. Then, in step 9 cover and cook over low heat for 70 minutes.

تهدیکشیری

Milk Crust—In a mixing bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk, a few drops of saffron water, and 3 spatulas (about 2 cups) of the parboiled rice. Spread the mixture in the bottom of the pot and mound the rest of the rice over it. In step 8 cover and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes. Then, in step 9 cover and cook over low heat for 60 minutes.

تهدیکسات تخم مرغ

Egg Crust—In a mixing bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, a few drops of saffron water, 2 tablespoons yogurt, 2 egg yolks, and 3 spatulas (2 cups) of the parboiled rice. Spread the mixture in the bottom of the pot and mound the rest of the rice over it. In step 8 cover and cook over medium heat for 20 minutes. In step 9 cover and cook over low heat for 60 minutes.

تهدیکنان کواش

Lavash Crust—In a mixing bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, and a few drops of saffron water, and spread in the pot. Place a layer of *lavash* bread on top to fit the bottom of the pot and mound the rest of the rice over it. For this crust, in step 8 cover and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes. Then, in step 9 cover and cook over low heat for 50 minutes.

تهدیکسیب زنبی

Potato Crust—In a mixing bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, and a few drops of saffron water, and spread in the pot. Arrange slices of peeled $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick rounds of russet potatoes (do not wash the potatoes, the starch helps to bind the *tah-dig*) to fit the bottom of the pot. Place a thin layer of rice over the potatoes and press down firmly with your hands. Mound the rest of the rice on top. For this crust, in step 8 cover and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes. Then, in step 9 cover and cook over low heat for 70 minutes.

تهدیکب

Quince Crust—In a mixing bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, and a few drops of saffron water, and spread in the pot. Arrange $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick rounds of cored quinces to fit the bottom of the pot. Place a thin layer of rice over the quinces and press down firmly with your hands. Mound the rest of the rice on top. For this crust, in step 8 cover and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes. Then, in step 9 cover and cook over low heat for 60 minutes.

NOTE

I am giving you guidelines and proportions for making your favorite golden crust, tah-dig. However, you should experiment and practice using your stovetop (I am using a gas flame) and the type of basmati rice you have. Making good rice with a perfect golden crust is all about the combination of the temperature and the cooking time.

Traditionally, Iranians use a ready-made padded lid (damkoni) to cover the rice pot to prevent steam from escaping during long-term steaming. You can buy one or make your own. Otherwise, wrap a clean dish towel over the lid of the pot, as shown on the previous page, to prevent steam from escaping when the lid covers the pot during the steaming phase.



A POTATO CRUST TAH-DIG



A LAVASH BREAD CRUST TAH-DIG