

CHELOW (PERSIAN RICE)

(adapted from several sources)

1 + $\frac{3}{4}$ cups Basmati rice
2 Tablespoons salt for cooking rice
A pinch of saffron strands
A pinch of sugar
A pinch of salt
2 tbsp very hot water
2 tbsp butter, divided
2 tbsp grapeseed oil

Rinse the rice in several changes of cold water until the water runs clear, then leave to soak in a large bowl of water for 20 to 30 minutes. Drain and set aside. Bring a large pot of water to the boil and add 2 tablespoons of salt. Add the rice and cook for 5 minutes. The grains should still be pretty firm at this point. Drain, rinse briefly with cold water to prevent it from cooking any further. Reserve.

Make the saffron infusion by using a pestle and mortar to grind the saffron strands with a pinch of sugar and salt, then dissolve it with the very hot water. Leave to steep for a few minutes. To make a plain tahdig for this amount of rice, you need an 8-inch nonstick saucepan with a snug-fitting lid. Melt 1 tablespoon of the butter with the grapeseed oil over medium heat on an 8-inch nonstick pan. Add 1 tablespoon of the saffron liquid. When the oil is hot, sprinkle a thin layer of rice over the bottom and firmly press it down, covering the bottom of the pan. Carefully lay the rest of the rice on top, allowing it to form a domed shape at the center. Using the handle of a wooden spoon, make a few holes in the rice, almost reaching the bottom of the pan. Place the remaining tablespoon of butter, cut in little pieces, in the holes you formed. Sprinkle the rest of the saffron liquid on top of the rice, then put either a tea towel or four layers of paper towels on the surface, tucking the edges in. Cook the rice on medium heat for 5 minutes, then turn the heat down, as low as your stove will go, and cook for 15 minutes longer. Take it off the heat and allow it to sit for a few minutes, while you fill your sink with a couple of inches of very cold water.

Place the saucepan in the water. That will loosen the crust at the bottom, and should allow you to un-mold it nicely. Take the lid off, put a large plate on top, and without hesitation, flip the pan over to release the rice on the plate. If all goes well, you'll be rewarded with a beautiful rice "cake", a nice crust on top of perfectly cooked Basmati rice.