

## Persian-Style Rice with Golden Crust (Chelow)

### WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

*Chelow* is a classic Iranian dish that marries an unusually light and fluffy rice pilaf with a golden-brown, crispy crust (which is known as *tahdig*). It is, in essence, two dishes in one. We found that rinsing the rice and then soaking it for 15 minutes in hot salted water was just as effective as the traditional 24-hour cold-water soak for producing fluffy grains. Parboiling the rice and then steaming it to finish cooking was also essential to creating the best texture for the pilaf and the perfect crust. But steaming the grains for 30 minutes rather than the traditional hour was enough; we also wrapped the lid with a towel to absorb extra moisture and thereby ensure fluffiness. Combining a portion of the rice with thick Greek yogurt and oil created a nicely browned, flavorful crust, while chunks of butter added during steaming enriched the pilaf portion. The yogurt also made the *tahdig* easier to remove from the pot, as did brushing the bottom of the pot with a little extra oil and letting the pot rest on a damp towel after cooking. Adding cumin seeds and parsley to the dish made for a more interesting and well-rounded flavor profile.

### Serves 6

We prefer the nutty flavor and texture of basmati rice, but Texmati or another long-grain rice will work. For the best results, use a Dutch oven with a bottom diameter between 8½ and 10 inches. It is important not to overcook the rice during the parboiling step, as it will continue to cook during steaming. Begin checking the rice at the lower end of the given time range. Do not skip placing the pot on a damp towel in step 7—doing so will help free the crust from the pot. Serve this pilaf alongside stews or kebabs.

### INGREDIENTS

- 2** cups basmati rice
- Salt
- 1** tablespoon plus ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1/4** cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 1/2** teaspoons cumin seeds
- 2** tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 8 cubes
- 1/4** cup minced fresh parsley

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Place rice in fine-mesh strainer and rinse under cold running water until water runs clear. Place rinsed rice and 1 tablespoon salt in medium bowl and cover with 4 cups hot tap water. Stir gently to dissolve salt; let stand for 15 minutes. Drain rice in fine-mesh strainer.
- 2.** Meanwhile, bring 8 cups water to boil in Dutch oven over high heat. Add rice and 2 tablespoons salt. Boil briskly, stirring frequently, until rice is mostly tender with slight bite in center and grains are floating toward top of pot, 3 to 5 minutes (begin timing from when rice is added to pot).
- 3.** Drain rice in large fine-mesh strainer and rinse with cold water to stop cooking, about 30 seconds. Rinse and dry pot well to remove any residual starch. Brush bottom and 1 inch up sides of pot with 1 tablespoon oil.
- 4.** Whisk remaining ¼ cup oil, yogurt, 1 teaspoon cumin seeds, and ¼ teaspoon salt together in medium bowl. Add 2 cups parcooked rice and stir until combined. Spread yogurt-rice mixture evenly over bottom of prepared pot, packing it down well.
- 5.** Stir remaining ½ teaspoon cumin seeds into remaining rice. Mound rice in center of pot on top of yogurt-rice base (it should look like small hill). Poke 8 equally spaced holes through rice mound but not into yogurt-rice base. Place 1 butter cube in each hole. Drizzle 1/3 cup water over rice mound.
- 6.** Wrap pot lid with clean dish towel and cover pot tightly, making sure towel is secure on top of lid and away from heat. Cook over medium-high heat until rice on bottom is crackling and steam is coming from sides of pot, about 10 minutes, rotating pot halfway through for even cooking.

**7.** Reduce heat to medium-low and continue to cook until rice is tender and fluffy and crust is golden brown around edges, 30 to 35 minutes longer. Remove covered pot from heat and place on damp dish towel set in rimmed baking sheet; let stand for 5 minutes.

**8.** Stir 2 tablespoons parsley into rice, making sure not to disturb crust on bottom of pot, and season with salt to taste. Gently spoon rice onto serving platter.

**9.** Using thin metal spatula, loosen edges of crust from pot, then break crust into large pieces. Transfer pieces to serving platter, arranging evenly around rice. Sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoons parsley and serve.

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