



In the second semester of Ellie's sophomore year, Mehrdad asks her out for a chelo kabab lunch at the famed Nayeb restaurant. True to Ellie's and her mother's suspicions, Mehrdad proposes marriage to Ellie over their meal.

Chelo (or chelow) kabab is known as the national dish of Iran. The kababs can be chicken chunks (jujeh); marinated beef, lamb or chicken; minced meat chunks or a combination.

### **Jujeh (Chicken) Kabab**

*Makes 4 servings*

2 ½ pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts

1 large onion, thinly sliced

1 tablespoon tomato puree

5 tablespoons Greek yogurt

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

¼ teaspoon ground saffron, bloomed in ¼ cup water

Juice from 1 large lemon

Salt and pepper to taste

1 large garlic clove, crushed or minced

1 to 2 tablespoons butter, melted

Chop chicken into chunks (fairly large as they will shrink when cooking).

Put chicken pieces in a bowl and then add all remaining ingredients except the butter. Massage into the chicken until all marinade is mixed in and evenly distributed among the pieces. It will be a yellow/orange color. Cover and refrigerate for at least 12 hours. Remove chicken from fridge about 30 minutes before you want to cook it to bring it up to room temperature.

When you are ready to cook the chicken (either on your grill or under your broiler on the highest setting), divide chicken onto about 4 skewers and cook, basting with the butter and turning skewers until chicken is a little charred. It takes roughly 15 to 25 minutes on a grill, depending on how hot it is. Note: It takes a little less time under the broiler.

Serve alongside chelo rice or lavash bread, shirazi salad, maast o moosir (dried Persian shallot yogurt dip) and/or grilled tomatoes.

Adapted from <https://saffronandherbs.com/2021/06/07/jujeh-kabab>

This saffron-flavored tahdig rice is unique for its crunchy layer, created at the bottom of the pot. "Tahdig" literally means "bottom of the pot." The recipe looks complicated but really is not. Be sure to use basmati rice.

### **Tahdig Rice (Crispy Persian Rice)**

Makes 4 to 6 servings

2 cups white long-grain  
basmati rice  
2 tablespoons salt  
Water (as directed below)  
1/8 teaspoon ground saffron  
bloomed in 2 tablespoons  
water for the tahdig  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
2 to 3 tablespoons ghee or  
butter



**Soak rice:** Wash rice in cold water until water runs clear. Place rice with 1 tablespoon salt in a bowl. Pour in cold water to cover by 2 inches. Let soak at least 30 minutes or overnight.

**Parboil the rice:** Fill a large nonstick saucepan (at least 2 ½ quarts) with about 1 ½ quarts of water and 1 tablespoon salt. Place over high heat and bring water to a boil.

Drain rice and add to saucepan. Gently stir to make sure it does not stick to the pan. Stay with the saucepan; do not leave it at this stage. It is crucial that you remove the rice and drain it at the right time. Every minute, give it a gentle stir and take a grain and check the texture—either between your fingers or using your teeth. You want the grain to be soft on the outer layer but still firm in the center. It can take any time from 3 to 7 minutes.

Once the rice reaches the correct texture, turn off heat and drain rice in a colander or sieve. Sprinkle with a little cold water to halt the cooking process. Taste the rice; if it is very salty, then rinse it further with a little water.

**Prepare the tahdig layer:** Place the empty saucepan on your stove. Add 2 tablespoons oil and 1 tablespoon butter or ghee and place over low heat to melt. Then turn off heat. Add your bloomed saffron to the saucepan and mix with the oil to distribute evenly (this will give a lovely golden color to your tahdig).

To make your tahdig, spoon about a 1-inch layer of rice into the saucepan and gently stir to mix with the saffron oil to ensure color is distributed evenly. Be careful not to break the grains. Then pat down flat with the back of a spoon.

Then layer the remaining rice on top and gently pat down to the shape of the saucepan. Take the end of a tablespoon and gently poke about 5 small holes in the rice to allow steam to escape while cooking. Then pour 2 tablespoons of cold water over the top. Drizzle with 1 to 2 tablespoons melted ghee or butter.

**Steam the rice:** Place glass lid on the saucepan and turn heat to the highest setting. Once you start to see steam rise from the rice (your glass lid will start to get clear from the steam and droplets of water will start to form on the lid), lower the heat to the minimum flame. Cover lid with a tea towel (making sure it is not a fire risk) and replace the lid on the saucepan.

Allow to steam for a minimum of 45 minutes to get a crunchy and thick layer of tahdig.

**Serve:** When cooking time is over, turn off heat and remove lid from saucepan. Take a serving dish that covers the opening of the saucepan and place it on top. Flip the rice out onto the dish and serve with either a kabab, curry or any other dish.

Adapted from <https://saffronandherbs.com/2020/12/13/chelow-and-tahdig/>

## **Maast o Moosir**

### **(Dried Persian Yogurt Dip)**

*Makes 2 ½ cups*

½ cup dried Persian shallots  
2 cups plain Greek yogurt  
½ teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

**Garnish:**  
2 tablespoons fresh mint sprigs  
2 teaspoons rose petals (optional)  
Olive oil drizzle (optional)

Soak the dried shallots in cold water 4 hours to overnight, until soft. Drain, rinse a couple of times and then drain well or pat dry.

Cut out stem ends and any other hard parts of the soaked shallots. Then finely chop the slices. Combine chopped shallots, yogurt, salt and pepper and mix well. Transfer to a small serving bowl. Cover and let chill several hours so flavors can blend.

Garnish with fresh mint leaves or rose petals and, if desired, a drizzle of olive oil.

**Note:** The dried shallots are available at Shirazi Market, 2864 N. Oakland Ave.

Adapted from <https://www.thedeliciouscrescent.com/persian-yogurt-dip-with-shallots/>