

Ellie and Mehrdad's wedding was an elaborate affair. She was 22 and happy, but she barely remembered any of the wedding feast—except this dish.

"I remember a bite of the traditional wedding jeweled rice with its rich, tart barberries tucked in, the bitterness of the slivered orange rind a great complement to the plump raisins. This medley of sweet and sour and bitter—perhaps a symbol for married life."

Persian Jeweled Rice (Wedding Rice)

Makes 6 servings

½ teaspoon saffron threads
2 tablespoons olive oil or butter
¼ teaspoon fennel seeds
¼ teaspoon cumin seeds
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon cardamom
¼ teaspoon ground allspice
1 medium onion, diced
1 ½ cups basmati rice, rinsed well
Salt and pepper to taste
2 bay leaves
Finely julienned rind of 1 orange
¼ cup barberries or dried tart cherries
¼ cup diced dried Turkish apricots
¼ cup diced dried figs
¼ cup toasted slivered almonds
¼ cup toasted pistachios
Seeds of 1 pomegranate for garnish



Mix saffron threads in 2 ¼ cups of hot water and set aside. (Note: You can use vegetable or chicken stock if you prefer.)

Heat oil or melt butter in a large skillet over medium-low heat and sauté the fennel and cumin seeds until fragrant, just a minute or two. Add cinnamon, cardamom and allspice and stir to combine. Add onion and sauté over low heat until onion is softened, about 10 minutes.

Add rice and sauté a minute or 2 with the spices and onion. Pour in saffron-infused water, along with bay leaves and orange rind. Stir to combine and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer.

Add fruit and nuts, stir to combine, and cover skillet with a tight-fitting lid. Cook over low to medium heat about 12 minutes, then turn off heat and let it sit, covered, another 10 minutes. **Note:** Check your rice after 12 minutes, and if it's not tender, let cook a few minutes more.

When rice is done, fluff it, remove bay leaves, and spoon onto a large platter. Scatter pomegranate seeds on top to garnish.

Notes: For extra flavor, use heaping $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons when measuring your spices. If desired, keep some extra fruit and nuts aside so you can sprinkle them, along with the pomegranate seeds, across the rice in the final presentation.

Note: Dried barberries are available at Shirazi Persian Market, 2864 N. Oakland Ave.

Adapted from <https://theviewfromgreatisland.com/persian-jeweled-rice/>

