



A GUIDE TO



# COOKING PERSIAN *with* MY MOTHER

# A Culinary Journey

Persia, a land steeped in ancient civilization, has a rich culinary heritage that has captivated taste buds for centuries. From the grand palaces of the Persian Empire to the cozy homes of modern-day Iran, Persian cuisine has evolved, yet remains deeply rooted in tradition. This cookbook is a tribute to the timeless recipes passed down through generations, particularly those cherished by our beloved mothers. As my mother's daughter, these are some of my favourite dishes.

*'Bowls of food Moon and evening  
star do their slow tambourine  
dance to praise this universe. The  
purpose of every gathering is  
discovered to recognize beauty and  
love what's beautiful.'*

*-Rumi*



# TABLE *of*

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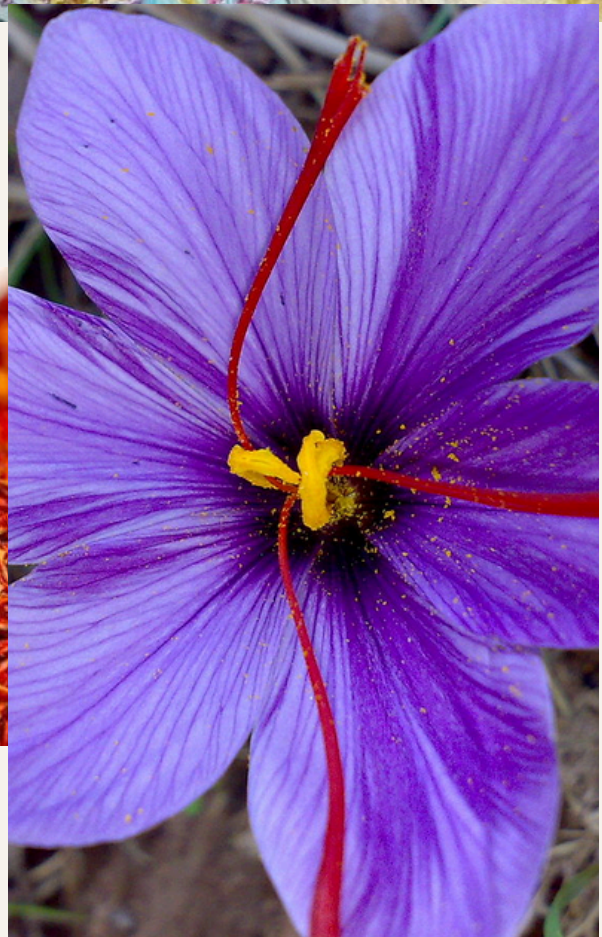
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# MOM'S LOVE

Letter

The essence of Persian cuisine lies in its generosity of ingredients, where flavors are offered abundantly and without reserve. Patience is at its core, as each dish is given the time it needs to reach its full potential, allowing every spice and aroma to bloom. Above all, Persian cooking is a love letter to family, friends, and the soul, with every meal crafted not just for sustenance, but to nourish the bonds that connect us all.

Rumi's verses, "Let the beauty of what you love be what you do," remind us that in everything that we do, lies the alchemy of love and patience, where each action is a verse, each flavor a story spun from the heart of Persia.

*Nooshe jan, Bon appetit!*

*Mom*

*"The lover's food is the love of the bread:  
no bread need be at hand:  
no one who is sincere in his love is a  
slave to existence."*



## THE BASICS

Persian cuisine, celebrated for its rich flavors and aromatic spices, is a harmonious blend of fresh herbs, delicate spices, and balanced ingredients. Central to this culinary tradition are dishes like Tahdig, the crispy rice delicacy or bottom of the pot, and Khoresh, a variety of slow-cooked stews. Kebabs, are marinated to perfection, while fresh herbs like parsley, cilantro, and mint, along with spices such as saffron and turmeric, infuse each dish with distinctive flavors. Accompaniments like yogurt dishes, salads and flat breads complete the meal, offering a delightful contrast of textures and tastes.

The essence of Persian cooking lies in its techniques and cultural significance. Slow cooking and layering flavors are key methods, ensuring that each dish develops a deep, complex taste. Persian cuisine masterfully balances sweet and sour elements, often incorporating both fresh and dried ingredients. This culinary tradition not only reflects Iran's rich history and diverse geography but also showcases a unique blend of cultural influences. Whether it's a sweet indulgence or the refreshing taste of Saffron Ice Cream, Persian cuisine offers a culinary journey that is both timeless and enchanting.

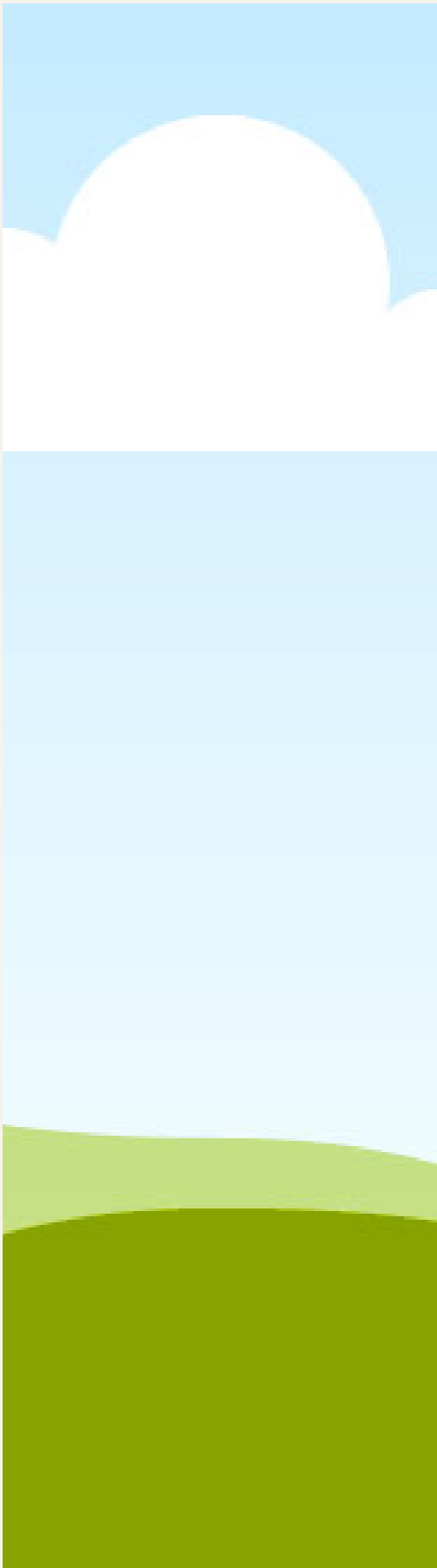
# THE BASICS

In Persian cuisine, the concepts of “hot” (garm) and “cold” (sard) foods are rooted in ancient medicinal practices and are not related to the temperature or spiciness of the food. Instead, they refer to the intrinsic qualities of the ingredients and their effects on the body. Hot foods are typically rich, oily, sweet, or spicy, and are believed to increase energy and warmth in the body. Examples include meats, nuts, and certain spices. Cold foods, on the other hand, are fresh and light, such as vegetables, dairy products, and grains like rice.

The goal in Persian cooking is to balance these hot and cold elements to promote health and harmony. This balance is thought to prevent ailments and maintain overall well-being.

In Persian cuisine, it’s advised to avoid mixing foods that are considered to be against each other, such as fish and dairy, and to refrain from combining fruits with vegetables to maintain digestive harmony and balance.

Fruits and nuts are usually eaten mid-morning; and black aromatic tea is always served after a meal.





# SOFREH

## *Laying the table*

Laying the table Persian-style is an act of both tradition and hospitality, where every item placed is a gesture of care and generosity. On every Persian table, you will always find the classics that elevate even the simplest meal into something special. Fresh herbs, usually from the garden—sabzi khordan—are abundant, with sprigs of mint, parsley, coriander, and tarragon piled high, offering their vibrant, cleansing aromas. The occasional raw onions, in quarters, and radishes, sit alongside, their sharpness a perfect contrast to the richness of other dishes. Thick natural yogurt, creamy and tangy, is never far from reach, offering a cooling companion to the rich foods that follow.

Pickled vegetables, or torshi, bring a burst of tart, fermented flavor to the table, their sourness a reminder that Persian cuisine thrives on balance. Fresh white cheese, crumbly and mild, pairs beautifully with the ever-present flatbread, a warm, soft canvas for layering these simple yet essential ingredients. Together, these offerings form the foundation of a Persian meal, not as mere accompaniments, but as vital components of the dining experience, ensuring that every bite is a celebration of freshness, contrast, and tradition.



## SOUPS & OTHER DELIGHTS

### *Ashkeh reshteh*

Once the chicken has learned the wisdom of the walnuts, uncover and pour in the pomegranate paste, its deep red like the blush of dawn on a desert horizon. If sweetness overshadows, a touch of lemon's sharp wisdom restores balance, a reminder that joy and sorrow walk hand in hand. Salt as the soul requires, and cover the pot again, allowing time to weave its magic.

When the chicken is tender, lift the lid and let the Fesenjan breathe, the sauce thickening like words unspoken. As the walnut oil rises, golden and pure, skim it gently, a gift from the dish to another day. With the chicken now steeped in ancient flavors, serve your Fesenjan, each bite a verse, each mouthful a journey through the poetry of Persian cooking, where every taste speaks of love, longing, and the beauty of the heart's true home.





# THE STEWS

## *Fesenjan*

Fesenjan is a winter dish due to its generous use of walnuts, ground fine and roasted. The use of pomegranate paste cuts the heat of the nuts ensuring 'hot & cold' balance.

Begin by sizzling the cut onions in oil. As the onions turn translucent, introduce the chicken pieces to the pan, their skin searing to a tender gold, kissed by the warmth of black pepper. Add the toasted ground walnuts, their rich, nutty essence grounding the dish. Cover the pot, letting the flavors commune together as the walnuts soften and merge with the chicken.

Pour in the deep dark pomegranate paste. If too sweet, restore balance with a touch of lemon, a reminder that joy and sorrow usually walk hand in hand. Salt as the soul requires, and cover the pot again, allowing time to weave its magic.

When the chicken is tender, lift the lid and let the Fesenjan breathe over very low heat, the sauce thickening like words unspoken. As the walnut oil rises, skim it off gently, a gift for another day's meal. With the chicken now steeped in deep, dark, tangy richness, serve your Fesenjan with white Basmati rice, each bite a verse, each mouthful a journey through the poetry of Persian cooking, where every taste speaks of love, longing, and the beauty of the heart's true home.

# Ghormeh Sabzi

This Herb stew made with lamb with its deep savoury, fresh, and slightly tangy deliciousness is loved by all!



## Shirazi Polo

Begin by gently coaxing the long-grain basmati rice into a dance with boiling water, cooking it only halfway, as if inviting it to pause and savor the journey. Meanwhile, aubergine slices sizzle in a separate pan, their skins browning like the edges of ancient scrolls. In another corner of the kitchen, barberries meet butter and sugar, their tartness softened by sweetness, simmering low as if whispering secrets. Once off the heat, stir in saffron—a golden sun dissolving into the night, filling the barberries with the glow of dawn.

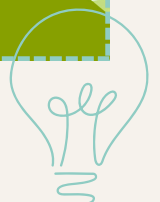
Cook chicken thighs with onions, pepper, and salt, until tender, their essence captured in a cup of broth set aside for later. As the chicken rests, mix some of the rice with egg yolks, saffron, yogurt, and a touch of pepper and salt—a golden, fragrant blend that speaks of earth and sky. Butter an oven dish, and spread this saffron-infused rice at the bottom, creating a foundation as rich as the soil beneath a blooming rose.

Layer upon this golden base the tender, deboned chicken, a layer of the sweet-tart barberry mix, and the fried aubergines, each element finding its place in this tapestry of flavors. Finally, cover with the remaining white rice, now tinged with the saffron's golden hue, pressing down with each layer, ensuring that every element is embraced by the whole. Pour the reserved chicken broth over it all, a final blessing that binds the layers together.

Cover the dish and place it in the oven, allowing the ingredients to commune in warmth for about two hours, transforming into something greater than the sum of their parts. When the time comes, unveil the Shirazi Polo, its layers now woven together like verses of an ancient poem, each bite a journey through the flavors of Persia, where every taste tells a story of love, longing, and the beauty found in the gathering of simple things.



*Bake at 180 for half an hour and then 160 the remaining time.*



# TEA & SWEETS

## Persian tea



Persian tea, known as “chai” in Farsi, is a staple of Iranian culture, enjoyed throughout the day. To prepare it, start by boiling water in a samovar or kettle. Place a few tablespoons of loose-leaf black tea, often mixed with a pinch of rose petals, rose water, saffron or cardamom pods, into a porcelain teapot. Pour the boiling water over the tea leaves, cover, and let it steep for about 5-10 minutes. For a more traditional method, the teapot is placed on top of the samovar to keep the tea warm and allow it to brew slow.

When serving, Persian tea is typically poured into small, delicate glasses, often accompanied by a sugar cube (ghand) for sweetness. Persians describe their tea by color, heat, and strength. The ideal Persian tea has a deep orange to dark brown hue, indicating a robust and well-brewed tea



Mix vigorously after adding boiling water to the tea leaves. The leaves need to rise to the top if seeped on low heat.

# TEA & DESSERTS

## Halva



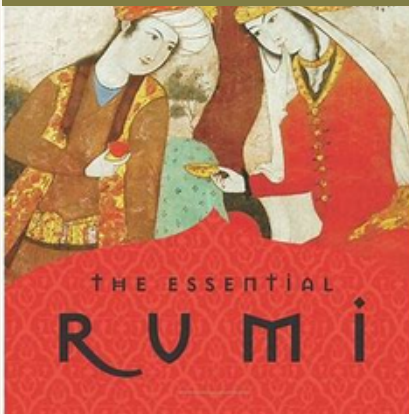
*Make a roux with butter, oil and flour & mix quickly on high heat, until golden.*



*Mix water, sugar, saffron, & rose water and add to roux in one go.*



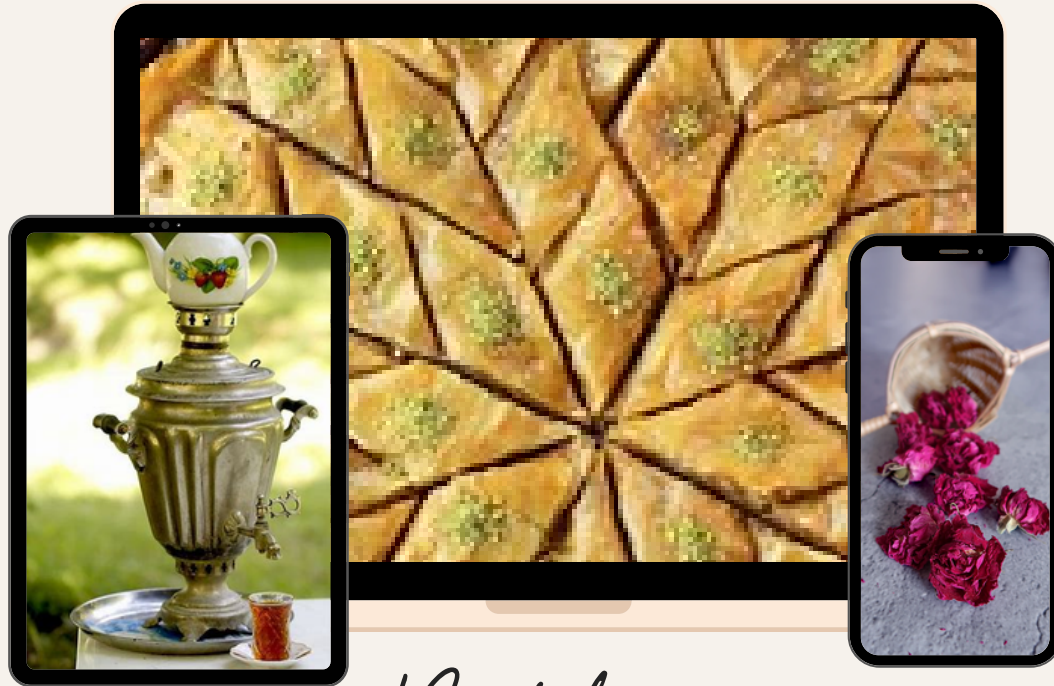
*Stir with spatula non-stop until the paste thickens. Then mix with wooden spoon.*



*Once thickened, shake the pot from side to side off the heat for a few minutes until it is a perfect consistency.*



*As the saffron halva cools, it solidifies into a golden testament to patience, strength, sweetness, and the beauty found in even the simplest acts. Each bite, a verse, each taste, a journey through the soul of Persia, where every flavor speaks of light, love, and the eternal dance between earth and sky.*



## Baklava

*Begin with the eggs, sugar, and oil, mixing them gently together as though blending light with shadow, sweetness with softness. In this union, flour and cardamom powder join, dusting the mixture with the scent of faraway lands, where spice markets hum with the memory of ancient caravans. A touch of baking powder and a fragrant splash of rosewater follow, like rain falling on desert roses, breathing life into the batter. Lastly, crushed almonds, their skins still intact like a secret kept close to the heart, are folded in, each nut a reminder of the earth's quiet strength.*

*Spread this mixture into a pan, and as the oven cradles it in warmth, the batter rises, turning golden like the first light of dawn. In a separate pot, sugar dissolves into water, and cardamom and rosewater join hands in this sweet symphony. A squeeze of lemon juice brings balance, a gentle note of tartness to offset the richness, as the syrup simmers, filling the air with promises of sweetness to come.*



## Baklava

Once the baklava emerges, golden and fragrant, it is carefully cut into lozenges, each diamond-shaped piece a tiny treasure. The hot syrup is poured over the top, soaking into every crevice, a golden river flowing through the valleys of almonds and spice. As the syrup is absorbed, pistachios are scattered across the top, like emeralds sprinkled upon the sands, their color bright against the golden canvas below.

And so the Persian baklava cools, each piece a story of sweetness and spice, bound together by the poetry of rosewater and cardamom. With each bite, taste the echoes of old stories, the warmth of a distant kitchen, and the beauty of simple things woven into something divine, a small celebration of life, love, and the sweetness that lingers long after the meal is done.

*Be like the sun for grace and mercy.  
Be like the night to cover others' faults.  
Be like running water for generosity.  
Be like death for rage and anger.  
Be like the Earth for modesty.*

*Appear as you are.  
Be as you appear.*

*Rumi*