



## Iranian Chicken in Walnut-Pomegranate Sauce

### Fesenjoon

*As Parivash Rohani, from Ardestan and Shiraz, Iran, taught Lindsay Sterling in Portland, Maine, March 2016*

Serves: 8

Cooking time: 2 hours active + 2 hours soaking rice

### Ingredients

For chicken in walnut sauce:

- 1 yellow onion
- 2 Tbsp + 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 pounds skinless boneless chicken breast
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/8 tsp + 1/8 tsp [powdered saffron](#) (Iranian saffron preferred)
- 3 Tbsp hot water
- 1 lb. walnuts
- 17 oz. [pomegranate molasses](#)
- 1-6 Tbsp sugar, depending on the sweetness of your Pomegranate molasses (sometimes it has sugar in it, sometimes not)

For saffron rice:

- 4 cups basmati rice ([Aahu Barah super sela](#) brand preferred)
- 4 tsp salt
- 2 medium potatoes
- 1/4 cup olive oil plus more for drizzling
- 1 dash rosewater (optional)

For Shirazi salad:



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- 1 head lettuce
- 1 lime
- 1 cucumber
- 3 tomatoes
- 3 Tbsp sumac
- 3 Tbsp dried mint
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 4 Tbsp olive oil

## Equipment

- food processor or blender
- large bowl
- measuring spoons (or eyeball it)
- 2 large pots with well-fitting lids
- cutting board
- chef knife
- mixing spoon
- liquid measuring cup
- spatula
- salad bowl
- serving bowl
- large serving platter
- small plate or 2nd mixing spoon
- strainer
- medium bowl
- tea kettle or small pan
- small glass or ceramic dish

## Instructions

1. Two hours or more ahead time, put the basmati rice in a large bowl, add 4 tsp salt, and cover the rice by a couple inches with cold water.

2. About two hours before you want to eat, cut onion into small dice. In a large pot with lid, saute onion in 2 Tbsp olive oil on medium high heat until soft. Cut chicken into 1-inch pieces. Add chicken pieces to the onions and saute until golden. Add salt, pepper, and 1/8 tsp powdered saffron, and 2 cups of water. Wash cutting board, knife, and anything else that touched raw chicken with



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soap and water.

3. In a separate small glass or ceramic dish, cover 1/8 tsp powdered saffron with 1/3 cup hot water and let steep.

4. In food processor pulse walnuts in batches into a fine meal. You might throw in a tablespoon of sugar to help. Mix the ground walnuts into the chicken, along with 17 oz. pomegranate molasses. Mix. Add more water if you need to so the texture is loose and soupy. Cook this mixture on medium with the lid on, stirring occasionally, for about an hour until the liquid thickens into a thick sauce (think like the meat sauce on your spaghetti).

5. While the walnut sauce is cooking, peel the potatoes and slice into planks about 1/4 inch thick. Put potatoes in a bowl and cover them with water (so they don't turn brown before you use them).

6. After the walnut mixture has cooked for about 30 minutes, strain the soaking rice and put it in a large pot that has a lid. Cover the rice by 2 inches with water. Bring rice to a boil, and let it continue to boil like you would pasta - for about 10 minutes. When the rice still has a hard center, but is softening on the outside. Drain the rice in a strainer.

7. Cover the bottom of the pot that you used to boil the rice with olive oil and make a layer of potato planks in the oil. Pile the strained rice on top of the potatoes. Use the back of the spoon to create vertical holes in the rice, which presumably help the moisture get around evenly. Nestle the small dish of steeping saffron water on top of the rice. Drizzle olive oil over the top of the rice. Cover the pot and heat on low for about 30 minutes, until the rice is fully cooked and the potatoes on the bottom are crispy and golden.

8. Keep stirring the walnut sauce every so often. Taste it. It should taste tangy and delicious. If it's too sour, add more sugar. A little sour is good because it goes well with the rice.

9. Prepare the salad. Cut up lettuce, dice cucumbers and tomatoes and put in a bowl. Sprinkle sumac and dried mint generously to cover the top of the salad. Sprinkle salt as desired. Squeeze the juice of a fresh lime over the salad. Drizzle olive oil on top as you wish, about 4 Tbsp.

10. Taste rice to see if it is soft. When it is, fill the dish of saffron-water completely with rice and put it on the counter. Scoop most of the rest of the rice onto a large serving platter. Keeping the bottom layer of rice and potatoes in the



pot for a minute.

11. Spread the saffron-soaked rice from the small dish over the top of the rest of the rice so the platter of rice looks beautiful yellow.

12. Fill a large wide bowl or your sink with cold water. Submerge just the bottom of the rice pot in the cold water for about 30 seconds. This helps the crispy rice and potatoes come up. Now loosen the fried potatoes and fried rice in the bottom of the pot with a spatula and put them on another platter.

13. Transfer chicken in sauce into a serving bowl. Serve yellow rice, crispy rice and potatoes, chicken in walnut sauce, and salad family style on the table. When making individual plates, Parivash likes to scoop the fesenjoon right on top of her pile of yellow rice.

If you like this dish, try it with lamb or beef meatballs instead of chicken.