

## Food: Sabzi Polo Mahi

This article is a direct replication from Culture of Iran\*

This dish is normally prepared for [Norouz] and is served with smoked or fried fish. Iranians cook rice differently from Indians and Orientals. Indian rice mainly Basmati or very good quality long grain white rice is used. The rice is normally soaked in water with salt before cooking for a couple of hours. This is done to reduce the cooking time. It takes longer for Iranian or Indian rice to be cooked. American rice should not be soaked otherwise it will become soft too quickly. After the rice is soaked it is drained and lightly washed under lukewarm water very briefly.

Iranians use non-sticky pots to cook their rice. The rice is first boiled on high heat with salt and cooking oil or unsalted butter. It is tested to see how soft or tough it is. Ideally it should be still slightly hard for the next stage. Once cooked it is drained again and ready to be cooked again on very low heat. Before the second cooking, a small amount of water and oil or unsalted butter are boiled together at the bottom of the non-stick pot, then the already boiled rice will be placed in the pot with more oil or butter and salt. The pot's lid is usually covered by a special cloth or towel to absorb all the steam. Once cooked over very low heat there will be a crunchy crust at the bottom of the pot. This is called tahdig, it is very tasty and popular and enables the rice to be served like a cake.

Ingredients (Serves 4):

- 4 cups (32 Oz) of white long grain basmati rice.

- 4 tablespoons of cooking oil or butter.

- 1/2 cup (4 Oz) chopped Chives/Scallion stems (tarreh/piaczeh).

- 1-1/2 cups (12 Oz) Parsley (jafaree).

- 1-cup (8 Oz) coriander (gheshneez).

- 1-1/2 cups (12 Oz) fresh Dill Weed (sheveed).

- 4 Oz of water.

For best results, soak the rice for a couple of hours in hot water and salt before cooking. Wash and drain the vegetables. Finely chop all the greens on a cutting board and make sure they are well drained.

Half fill a medium size pot with water; bring the water to a boil. Add the soaked rice and let it cook for a few minutes until it starts boiling. Stir the rice a few times during the boiling process. Occasionally test a few rice grains to see if they have softened. This should take between 15 to 25 minutes depending on the power of the heat.

Near the end of boiling, add the fresh chopped vegetables (if you are using dried vegetables do not add them in yet because they will get washed out). Stir the rice one last time and then take it out and drain it in a kitchen strainer. Run the tap water on it to wash out some of the excess salt.

Pour the oil in the pot, add 4 Oz of water, add a bit of extra oil or butter if necessary. If you are using dried vegetables in place of fresh ones, you will have to mix them in as you are adding thin layers of rice in the pot, in the shape of a heap.

With the back of a spoon, make five holes, one in the center and four around it so that the rice can breathe in the cooking process.

Spread a little water on top and close the lid. Let it cook for a few minutes on high heat. When steam starts to rise, change the setting to medium heat and let it cook for another 15-20 minutes. Then turn the heat to medium-low, sprinkle some butter or cooking oil to prevent drying, and let it cook for about another 10-15 minutes before serving. The longer it stays the more crust you will have.

If you have a choice, use any of the Basmati brands of rice (Aftab, Pari, Gilda, Feel-Neshan, etc.) you can buy these from Middle Eastern or Indian stores. But be careful not to over boil these types especially if they are soaked before cooking. They get sticky if over cooked. The pot used to cook rice slowly should be non-stick like Teflon. Place a large plate or a serving dish on top of the pot and then turning the pot upside down to serve the rice. This way the crust will be on the top and the rice will be like a cake. Mahi Sefeed, fried/baked white fish

All Iranian stores sell white fish similar to ones in Iran; however any kind of white fish can be used. Ingredients, 4 to 6 servings

For the fried version:

- 4-8 filets of White fish.

- 1 large onion.

- 1 & 1/2 medium lemons (limes will do fine as well).

- 1/2 (4 Oz.) cup all purpose white flour.

- 1-tablespoon curry powder (optional).

- 1-tablespoon turmeric (Zard Choobeh).

- A touch of salt and black pepper.

- 1 cup (8 Oz.) of milk.

- 1/2 cup (4 Oz.) of cooking oil.

For the baked version:

- 1 medium-large whole white fish.

- 1 large onion.

- 1 large bell pepper, and/or a few jalapeno peppers (if you prefer the spicy taste).

- 1 head of fresh garlic peeled and finely chopped.

- 2 cups (16 Oz.) of fresh chopped parsley (jafaree).

- 1/2 cup (4 Oz.) of fresh chopped coriander (gheshneez) or, 2 table spoons of dried coriander.

- 1 package of dried tamarind (tamr-e hendi).

**To fry:**

Slice the bell pepper, onion, and the whole lemon and set aside. Mix flour, curry powder and turmeric, salt and pepper together. This mixture should have a light orange color. If it is too white, increase the amount of curry and turmeric equally. Pour the milk in a bowl. Pour the cooking oil in a frying pan, put the heat setting to medium and spread the slices of lemon, onion and bell pepper and fry for a few minutes. Dip the pieces of fish in the milk, sprinkle thoroughly with the flour mixture and place in the frying pan on med-low heat. When one side is brown, turn over and squeeze the 1/2 lemon juice over them.

**HINTS:**

Dipping the pieces in milk before frying prevents them from breaking apart. This is optional. Flipping the filets several times, before one side is completely brown, prevents curling. If you prefer a more zesty taste and are adventurous, add a few slices of Jalapeno peppers while frying.

**To Bake:**

Place the tamarind paste in a bowl containing a cup of water. knead the paste until the seeds separate from the dried pulps. Run the mixture through a kitchen stringer to separate the seeds from the resulting sauce. Set it aside. Stir-fry the chopped onion; garlic and fresh peppers at first and then add the remaining chopped vegetables.

Stir-fry for a few more minutes. Take it off the heat and set it aside.

Set the oven to bake at 350 degrees (F). Place the fish in an oven safe dish, add a touch of cooking oil, salt and pepper, stuff the fish with the stir fried vegetable mixture and pour the tamarind sauce over the vegetable stuffing. Cover the dish with aluminum foil for half of the baking period. Bake at this setting for about an hour. By the end of the baking period, the outer layer of the fish should have a reddish color and the meat should be flaky to the touch of a fork. This stuffed fish is the Southern version of the white fish which is traditionally served as [Norouz] dinner.

\* Culture of Iran