

Khoresht-e Bademjaan

with pollo sefid ba tahdig and maast-o khiar

by Naseem Jamnia

as featured in *Making Khoresht-e Bademjoon When I'm Homesick*

This trio of recipes prepares a hearty meal, perfect for a cozy dinner. **Khoresht-e bademjaan** is a rich Persian eggplant stew made with beef or lamb, and it pairs perfectly with **pollo sefid ba tahdig**, a crispy-bottomed preparation of basmati rice. Serve with cool, refreshing **maast-o khiar**, a cucumber-yogurt condiment that balances the savory warmth of the stew. **Prepared as written, this trio of recipes makes 4-5 generous servings.**

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Khoresht-e Bademjaan | خورش بادمجان

Ingredients

- Oil of choice [*ed. note: this recipe uses high heat, so aim for an oil with a high smoke point, like avocado oil, canola oil, or peanut oil.*]
- 2-2.5 pounds beef eye-of-round or lamb eye-of-round
- 4-5 Chinese or Japanese eggplants (the long ones)
- 2 medium-large yellow onions
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 2 heaping Tbsp of tomato paste (or roughly half a 6oz can)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Supplies

- A large pot with a well-fitting lid
 - A large skillet
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Instructions

Prep

- Cut the onions into half-moons by slicing each onion in half, then laying those halves flat side down and cutting into roughly ¼" slices.
- Cut the meat into two-inch cubes. You're aiming for a size that will break into 2 bites when cut with a fork.

Step One

Warm a tablespoon of oil in the pan until it shimmers. Sauté the onions 7-10 minutes, until past sweating but before browning. It's okay if the edges brown a bit.

Step Two

Add the meat to the pan and sauté about 5 minutes, until brown. Don't worry if meat and bits of onion stick to the pan at this stage.

Step Three

Add turmeric, salt, and pepper; sauté for 2-3 minutes. Add tomato paste; sauté 2-3 more minutes.

Step Four

Add enough water so it comes up over the meat about one inch. Bring to a jolly simmer, then turn down heat until a gentle simmer. Cover and **simmer over low heat until meat is tender enough to easily pierce with a fork**, 2-3 hours. *[Ed. note: if you haven't cooked a recipe like this before, are using a new pot, or are uncertain of the quality of your pot lid's seal, check the pot every 30 minutes or so. If the liquid falls below the top of the meat, add more water.]*

Step Five Prep

Begin this step when the meat is mostly tender but still provides a little resistance to your fork (1.5 - 2.5 hours after Step Four).

- Rinse each eggplant and remove the tough peel.
- Cut into 4" - 5" long segments.
- Optional: If the diameter of your eggplant is thicker than 1.5", cut in half width-wise (so you have half cylinders).

Step Five

Heat a few tablespoons of cooking oil in a large skillet. **Fry eggplant on all sides until brown and soft.** Note that you should not add salt at this stage.

Step Six

When the meat in the simmering pot is tender enough to easily pierce with a fork, **add fried eggplant to the pot.** Spoon the sauce in the pot over the meat and eggplant.. Continue to **simmer for another 30 minutes** until the meat is fall-apart-when-poked-tender.. The consistency of the khoreshht should be between that of a stew and that of a curry. At this stage, adjust salt and pepper to taste.

Note: If the khoreshht seems too watery, allow it to simmer without a lid until some water evaporates. Adjust salt and pepper to taste at this point—it'll become more salty as the water evaporates off, so adjusting it earlier will lead to mixed results. You don't want to quite hit curry consistency; watery is okay.

Serving recommendations

Serve with [pollo sefid ba tahdig](#) and [maast-o khiar](#). Store leftovers covered in the refrigerator for 3-5 days, or frozen for up to 6 months.

Recommended substitutions and modifications

- **If you don't like soft eggplants:** before frying the eggplant, brush all sides with an egg white wash (fork-whipped egg whites are fine). Alternatively, salt all sides of the eggplant and leave standing for ten minutes before wiping down and frying. The result will be crispier.
- **Alternative cuts of beef.** Note that beef eye-of-round is best for the flavor of this recipe. That said, you can use any stewing beef for a more inexpensive version.
- **No red meat.** If you don't eat red meat, you can use chicken (thighs or breasts) instead.
 - Using a large pan with raised sides instead of a pot, brown the chicken when you would be browning the beef/lamb.
 - Follow recipe instructions for steps 3-6, but reduce the cooking time and water significantly. Use enough water to come about halfway up the sides of the pan, or just barely covering the chicken.
 - Bone-in thighs will simmer 45-60 minutes and breasts will simmer for about 30 minutes.
 - Keep an eye on the consistency of the khoresht in case you need to add more boiling water.
 - If you cut the chicken into bite-sized chunks instead of whole chicken pieces, you can fully cover the chicken pieces with water per recipe instructions. Using smaller pieces means your timing can be reduced further - use your best judgement based on the piece sizes.
 - For any preparation using chicken, begin preparing your eggplant as soon as you cover your meat and leave it to simmer.
- **No meat at all.** Consider using cauliflower, potato, or crispy fried tofu instead of meat. Add vegetable stock instead of water to enhance flavor. Adjust cooking times according to the usual braising/stewing conventions of your meat alternative.
- **Alternative onion.** You can use any onions you have, though yellow or white is best.

- **Alternative eggplants.** In a pinch, you can use other types of eggplants for the Chinese/Japanese if cut down to size, but substitution should only be made as a last resort.
 - **Tomato paste.** Tomato sauce is frequently recommended as a tomato paste substitute; that won't work in this recipe, tomato paste is strictly necessary.
 - **Scale up or down.** Use .5 lb meat, 1 eggplant, and .5 cup rice per person. If you have an unexpected guest, add some boiling water to the khoreshht to thin it out, and bring bread to the table. There's always enough to go around.
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Pollo sefid ba tahdig | پلو سفید با ته دیگ

Ingredients

- Oil of choice *[ed. note: this recipe uses high heat, so aim for an oil with a high smoke point, like avocado oil, canola oil, or peanut oil.]*
- 2 cups dry basmati rice
- Salt
- A pinch or two of saffron (optional, see recipe notes)
- Bread like thin pita, lavaash, or tortillas OR 1 small potato (optional, see recipe notes)

Supplies

- A bigger pot than you think you need, with a well-fitting lid.
 - A clean tea towel or paper towels
 - A strainer or colander
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Instructions

Prep

- *Do this step about an hour before you plan to serve the meal.* Rinse rice in a bowl, swirling with your hand, and dump out the water multiple times until the water is mostly clear. Drain thoroughly.

Step One

Par-cook the rice as follows:

Add rice to the pot.

Add enough cold water for there to be 1-3 inches of water atop the rice.

Add salt to taste—when you taste the water, it should be salty but not overwhelmingly so.

Heat over medium-high or high heat, until the water starts to boil. Cook rice 15-20 minutes. When you try a grain of rice between your teeth, it should be tender but still have a bite to it.

Remove rice from heat, drain, and set aside.

Step Two

Add ¼C oil to the pot and swirl to coat in an even layer. Heat the oil until hot. You can throw some grains of rice into the pot to help judge when it's hot enough; if the rice starts sizzling, the pot is ready.

Step Three

Return the drained rice into the pot with the oil.

Wrap a tea towel or dishcloth around the pot lid (or place a paper towel on top of the rice) and cover.

Cook over medium-low heat 35-45 minutes.

The rice will be fluffy when you lift off the lid and towel. To make sure the crispy rice at the bottom (the tahdig) is done, you can dig a spoon into the rice; when you get to the bottom, you should have some resistance and hear a crunch when you break through.

Serve

When the rice is done, place a platter *bigger than the lid of your pot* face-down on top of the pot. In one fluid motion, with the platter still laying on top, lift the pot and flip it so that when you lift up the pot, the rice is standing on the platter like a cake. The tahdig will be golden brown.

If this makes you nervous, or if this method of serving is inaccessible to you for mobility reasons, spoon the rice out onto a platter and serve the crispy tahdig separately.

Recommended substitutions and notes from Naseem

- **Substitute rice:** You can use brown basmati rice if you prefer, though you'll have to boil it for much longer to get it to parboil. Don't substitute another type of rice (like arborio or rosematta) for basmati.
- **Additional prep steps for fluffier rice.**
 - **Iranian rice method #1:** Rinse the rice the night before and then soak the rice in salt water (at least an inch of water above the rice). You can add the salt directly to the water after the rice is already in it. Drain the rice the next day and continue from Step One as directed, but do NOT add extra salt when you begin to cook the rice.
 - **My Iranian mother's rice method #2:** Rinse the rice and place it in the cooking pot, then boil a full electric kettle's worth of water and let your rinsed rice soak in it for a minute or two before cooking the rice in the water it soaked in according to the full recipe instructions. This accomplishes a similar result as Iranian rice method #1 with less effort.
- **Modified methods**
 - **My Iranian mother's tahdig method #1:** Before adding your rice back to the pot, grind up a pinch or two of saffron and add a few tablespoons of hot water to it. Stir, leave 5-15 minutes, then dump into the pot, followed by the oil. Swirl so it distributes, then add the rice.
 - **Iranian tahdig method #2:** After adding the saffron from the method #1 (or not), add a single layer of very thin pita (the ones the size of dinner plates that aren't fluffy), tortilla, laavash, or a similarly thin bread, or thinly sliced (raw) potato. Then put parboiled rice on top.
 - **Iranian tahdig method #3:** After returning the parboiled rice to the pot, use the back end of a wooden spoon or equivalent to make 3-4 equidistant holes in the rice to the bottom. This allows steam to escape, rather than being re-absorbed into the rice while cooking.
- **Tips and troubleshooting**
 - If you oversalted your rice while par-boiling, rinse it when you drain it.

- **If you're running out of water during Step One** but the rice isn't parboiled yet (by a lot), boil some extra water in an electric kettle and add it to the pot.
 - **If you think the rice isn't quite parboiled enough when you get to Step Two**, add a tablespoon of water with the oil before putting the rice back in the pot.
 - **There are usually some grains of rice stuck to the pot when you drain it.** Nothing to worry about; you don't need to scrape them out.
 - **If you end up serving the rice and tahdig separately**, it's nice to add some saffron in the mix. Bloom a pinch or two of saffron in a few tablespoons of hot water with a pad of butter for 5-15 minutes. Add a few heaping spoonfuls of rice (enough that it absorbs all the liquid and turns golden) and mix. Spread atop the rest of the rice.
 - **Saving undercooked tahdig:** If, when you flip the pot, the tahdig is pale, reverse the process (put the pot on top of the rice on the platter, then flip the platter and pot so rice returns to the pot tahdig-down); turn up the heat on high for 3-7 minutes (depending on how pale) and flip back. I don't recommend doing this correction more than once.
 - **Reheating tahdig** (if you somehow have leftovers): People say it can't be done, but it can! Heat oil in a pan and fry it tahdig-side down until crispy. It's not 100% like fresh, but it makes a big difference.
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Maast-o khiaar | ماست و خیار

Ingredients

- 1 32 oz tub plain whole milk yogurt
 - 1 English seedless cucumber (the long kind; usually comes shrink-wrapped) or equivalent seedless cucumbers
 - 2 Tbsp dried mint
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Instructions

Prep

- Wash, peel, and dice the cucumber.

- Roughly crush dried mint between your palms or using a mortar and pestle.

Step One

Combine all ingredients. Salt to taste.

Recommended substitutions and modifications

- **For the cucumber to yogurt ratio,** adjust it to taste. My family tends to be generous with the cucumbers.
 - **Don't add pepper to the mast-o khia**r unless it's on your own plate. If the yogurt sits, pepper tends to make it bitter.
 - **Substitutions: you can use a non-whole milk yogurt, but whole milk tastes best.** It could potentially taste okay with non-dairy yogurt — try it and let us know!
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Don't forget: care for yourself and the people around you. Believe that the world can be better than it is now. Never give up.