

# Biryani

**BIRYANI** is the royal dish amongst all the exotic rice dishes of India, and remains "the dish" to serve on all best and auspicious occasions. Whether one serves it to welcome house guests on their first day, or whether it be the main course of the menu in formal entertaining, or a gala festivity, the painstaking care which the housewife will take in the preparations of Biryani will commence when she selects her ingredients.

Nothing but the best will do. Although there are numerous variations of Biryani, our carefully compiled recipes are fit to serve Royalty.

The pride and care that goes in the making of Biryani is a story in itself. We remember nostalgically, the day when grandma used to make Biryani. The frying of the onions just to that particular goldness; the weighing of the saffron with the precision of a goldsmith; the marinating of the meat in the spices and curds; the sealing of the pot with dough and clean white cloth; the weighing down of the lid with a brick; the listening in, in order to ascertain whether it is ghee or moisture that is sizzling, plus a lot of other rigmarole.

We must confess that in those days the pot of Biryani, when finally opened, announced itself to the whole neighbourhood, and the aroma and fragrance that emanated was sufficient to make the most fastidious smack their lips in anticipation.

Whilst we cannot indulge in all these time consuming activities, here is a recipe which even grandmother will be hard put to improve upon.

## Biryani

(KEY RECIPE) for 6-8 persons

- 1 chicken (1½ kg) washed and disjointed
- 2 cups masoor (whole black lentils)
- 2 cups rice
- 2 pieces cinnamon sticks (tuj)
- 4 elachi (cardomom)
- 1 tsp jeero (cummin)
- 4 green chillies (slit)
- 1 cup yoghurt
- 2 tblsp fresh tomato (grated or pureed)
- 1 tblsp lemon juice
- 2 sprigs mint
- ¼ tsp saffron
- ¼ tsp turmeric (arud)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp dhunia/jeero (coriander/cummin)
- 1½ tsp red chillies
- 6 small potatoes
- 3 hard-boiled eggs
- ¾ cup oil and ¼ cup ghee
- 2 fair sized onions
- 1½ tsp ginger/garlic

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Allow saffron strands to become crisp over very low heat. Crush fine with back of spoon. Steep in a tablespoon of hot water.

Keep some saffron aside for tinting, 3 or 4 tblsp of the cooked rice. This must be spread on top of other rice, in streaks.

Fry onions in oil to a pale golden colour. Drain and cool. Leave aside 1 tablespoon of fried onions and crush rest coarsely. Wash and drain disjointed chicken. Place in large bowl. Add saffron and smear ginger/garlic over meat pieces by tossing it around meat, with spoon. Add yoghurt, tomatoes, spices, fried onions, whole green chillies, sprigs of mint and allow to marinate for at least 1 hour.

Meanwhile, boil masoor in salted water till done. Drain off in colander. Boil rice with 2 elachi and 1 piece tuj, the rest of elachi, etc., must be added to marinating meat. Rice must be drained when only half done. (Boil rice as for Pilau but leave slightly underdone). Fry potatoes to light yellow colour in oil used for frying onions. Remove from ghee and set aside.

In large flat bottomed pot (2-3 litre size) put in oil that was used for frying, plus half of ghee. Sprinkle a handful of rice and masoor over the bottom. Now arrange the marinating chicken and masalas carefully over bottom of pot. Now spread masoor over chicken, then the potatoes and then half of the rice. Place peeled hard boiled eggs over rice. Now spread rest of rice over eggs. Many people prefer to tint a little of the white rice with a tinge of saffron. This looks very attractive and puts the finishing touch to the Biryani.

Decorate with left-over fried onions, and sprinkle rest of ghee and half a cup of cold water over the top. Close and seal lid of pot tightly. Place over high heat for 5 minutes and as soon as it starts sizzling, lower heat and let simmer for 1 hour. By this time all moisture should have evaporated. Serve with fried rice papads, onion kachoomers, and its essential accompaniment, spiced dahi (see recipe on next page)

**NOTE:** If mutton is used, then add 1 more teaspoon of ginger/garlic, as well as ½ cup more of yoghurt. Pot should be allowed to steam half an hour or so longer depending on the toughness of meat. Remember to crack elachi pods open by pressing between fore-finger and thumb, but take care that seeds do not spill out.