

LEARNING MADE EASY



Persian Cooking

^{for}
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Master 120 easy-to-follow
Persian recipes

Make perfect Persian rice with
a golden crust every time

Discover cooking secrets from
Najmieh's kitchen to yours

Najmieh Batmanglij

The Queen of Persian Cooking

Persian Cooking

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Persian Cooking

by Najmieh Batmanglij

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Persian Cooking For Dummies®

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2022 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Trademarks: Wiley, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: WHILE THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHORS HAVE USED THEIR BEST EFFORTS IN PREPARING THIS WORK, THEY MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES REPRESENTATIVES, WRITTEN SALES MATERIALS OR PROMOTIONAL STATEMENTS FOR THIS WORK. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION, WEBSITE, OR PRODUCT IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHORS ENDORSE THE INFORMATION OR SERVICES THE ORGANIZATION, WEBSITE, OR PRODUCT MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR YOUR SITUATION. YOU SHOULD CONSULT WITH A SPECIALIST WHERE APPROPRIATE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR AUTHORS SHALL BE LIABLE FOR ANY LOSS OF PROFIT OR ANY OTHER COMMERCIAL DAMAGES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO SPECIAL, INCIDENTAL, CONSEQUENTIAL, OR OTHER DAMAGES.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002. For technical support, please visit <https://hub.wiley.com/community/support/dummies>.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022942044

ISBN 978-1-119-87574-1 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-119-87575-8 (ePDF); ISBN 978-1-119-87576-5 (epub)

Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Part 1: Getting Started with Persian Cooking	7
CHAPTER 1: Exploring Persian Culture through Food	9
CHAPTER 2: Tools of the Trade	15
CHAPTER 3: Shopping for Essential Ingredients	23
Part 2: Getting Comfortable in the Kitchen	35
CHAPTER 4: Common Persian Kitchen Techniques	37
CHAPTER 5: Using Staple Ingredients in Persian Dishes	63
CHAPTER 6: Delicately Spicing the Persian Way	71
CHAPTER 7: Bringing It All Together in a Persian Meal	77
Part 3: Appetizers and First Courses	83
CHAPTER 8: Healthy Yogurt Vegetable Dishes, Salads, and Sides	85
CHAPTER 9: Egg-xotic Egg Dishes	99
CHAPTER 10: Fill 'er Up! Stuffed Vegetables	111
CHAPTER 11: Warm and Hearty Soups and Porridge	121
Part 4: Main Courses	135
CHAPTER 12: Rice Is a Very Nice Dish	137
CHAPTER 13: Practicing Patience for Braises	163
CHAPTER 14: Sticking It to Kabobs and Roasts	181
CHAPTER 15: Savoring Meatballs, Patties, and Casseroles	195
CHAPTER 16: Fixing Fish Entrees	207
Part 5: Side Dishes, Desserts, and Other Delights	217
CHAPTER 17: Pickles and Preserves	219
CHAPTER 18: Pastries, Sweets, and Candies	233
CHAPTER 19: Delicious Desserts	247
CHAPTER 20: Breads and Street Food	257
CHAPTER 21: Thirst-Quenching Beverages	269

Part 6: The Part of Tens	277
CHAPTER 22: Ten (or So) Time-Saving Tips for the Kitchen	279
CHAPTER 23: Ten Myths about Persian Cooking	283
CHAPTER 24: Ten Tips on Persian Table Manners.	287
Appendix: Metric Conversion Guide	291
Index	295

Recipes at a Glance

Appetizers

☞ Barley and Leek Soup (Osh-e Jow)	126
Cabbage Leaves with Rice and Split Pea Stuffing (Dolmeh-ye Kalam).	114
Chicken and Egg Salad (Salad-e Olivier)	107
☞ Cucumber and Pomegranate Salad (Salad-e Khiar-o Anar)	90
☞ Cucumber and Tomato Salad (Salad-e Gojeh Khiar)	91
Eggplant with Lamb and Pomegranate Stuffing (Bademjan-e Shekam Por)	116
☞ Eggs and Fava Beans (Baqala Qataq)	102
☞ Fresh Herb Kuku (Kuku Sabzi)	104
☞ Fried Eggs with Fresh Ginger, Dates, and Saffron (Khagineh-ye Khorma) . . .	100
Grape Leaves with Sweet-and-Sour Stuffing (Dolmeh-ye Barg-e Mo)	112
☞ Noodle and Chickpea Soup (Osh-e Reshteh)	128
☞ Olive Walnut and Pomegranate Tapenade (Zaytun Parvardeh)	98
☞ Onion, Egg, and Spinach Soup (Eshkeneh)	123
Onions with Rice and Herb Stuffing (Dolmeh-ye Piaz)	118
☞ Pistachio Soup (Sup-e Pesteh)	132
☞ Pomegranate Soup (Osh-e Anar)	124
☞ Potato Kuku with Saffron-Rosewater Glaze (Kuku-ye Sib Zamini)	109
☞ Smoked Butternut Squash and Kashk Spread (Kashk-o Kadu)	93
☞ Smoked Eggplant and Egg Spread (Mirza Qasemi)	103
☞ Smoked Eggplant and Pomegranate Spread (Nazkhatun)	92
☞ Smoked Eggplant, Mint, Kashk, and Walnut Spread (Kashk-e Bademjan)	94
☞ Smoked Eggplant Tapenade (Kaleh Kabab)	95
☞ Spinach and Beet Soup (Osh-e Shuly)	127
Sweet-and-Savory Lamb Turnovers (Sanbuseh)	96
☞ Tomato, Egg, and Garlic Omelet (Pomodor Cheghertemeh)	101
☞ Walnut and Kashk Soup (Kaleh Jush)	131
Wheat and Turkey Porridge (Halim-e Gandom)	133
☞ Yogurt and Beet Salad (Borani-e Labu)	89
☞ Yogurt and Chickpea Soup (Osh-e Mast)	130
☞ Yogurt and Persian Shallot Salad (Mast-o Musir)	88
☞ Yogurt and Spinach Salad (Borani-e Esfenaj)	87
☞ Yogurt, Cucumber, and Rose Petal Salad (Mast-o Khiar)	86
☞ Zucchini Kuku (Kuku-ye Kadu Sabz)	106

Main Dishes

🍽️ Barberry Rice (Zereshk Polow)	152
Butternut Squash and Prune Braise (Khoresh-e Kadu Halvai-o Alu)	165
Celery Braise (Khoresh-e Karafs)	166
Chicken and Peach Braise (Khoresh-e Hulu)	172
Chicken Kabob (Jujeh Kabab)	191
Chicken, Vegetable, and Fruit Casserole (Tas Kabab)	202
Chicken, Walnut, and Pomegranate Braise (Khoresh-e Fesenjoon)	169
Chickpea and Carrot Patties (Shami)	198
Fava Bean and Dill Meatballs (Kufteh Baqali)	196
Fillet Kabob (Kabab-e Barg)	186
Fish Cooked in a Tamarind, Cilantro, and Garlic Broth (Qaliyeh-ye Mahi)	214
Fish Kabob with Garlic and Cilantro (Kabab-e Mahi)	193
Fish with Fresh Herbs and Barberry Stuffing (Mahi-e Tu Por ba Sabzi)	208
Green Beans, Tomato, and Chicken Braise (Khoresh-e Lubia Sabz)	167
Grilled Branzino with Tamarind and Cilantro (Mahi-e Kababi ba Tamr-e Hendi-o Gishniz)	210
Ground Lamb Kabob (Kabab-e Kubideh)	184
🍽️ Jeweled Rice (Javaher Polow)	154
Lamb and Potato Braise (Khoresh-e Qeymeh)	176
Lamb and Quince Braise (Khoresh-e Beh)	173
Lamb Rib Chops (Shishlik)	183
Lamb with Herbs and Dried Lime Braise (Khoresh-e Qormeh Sabzi)	174
Lime and Turmeric Roast Chicken (Morgh-e Beriyan)	206
Meat Patties (Kotlet-e Gusht)	201
Oven-Baked Rice with Lamb, Eggplant, and Barberries (Tachin)	146
Pistachio and Pomegranate Meatballs (Kufteh-ye Pesteh-o Anar)	199
🍽️ Plain Rice (Kateh)	141
Pomegranate-Infused Leg of Lamb (Barreh-ye Beriyan)	204
Rhubarb and Lamb Braise (Khoresh-e Rivas)	170
🍽️ Rice with Fava Beans and Dill (Baqala Polow)	150
🍽️ Rice with Green Beans (Lubia Polow)	156
🍽️ Rice with Lentils (Adas Polow)	148
🍽️ Rice with Potatoes and Cumin (Dami-e Zireh)	153
🍽️ Rice with Sour Cherries (Albalu Polow)	158
🍽️ Saffron Steamed Rice (Chelow)	142

Saffroned Chicken and Barberry Braise (Qeymeh Zereshk)	171
☞ Saffroned Persian-Style Quinoa (Quinoa)	145
Shrimp Balls in Spicy Tomato Sauce (Chubeh)	200
Skillet Kabob (Kabab-e Tabe'i)	190
Smoked Whitefish (Mahi-e Dudi)	216
☞ Smothered Rice, Rice Cooker-Style (Dami)	144
Spicy Chicken and Yogurt Braise (Khoresh-e Mast)	178
Spicy Fish-Crusted Rice (Havari-e Mahi)	160
Spicy Sweet-and-Sour Fish with Dates (Qaliyeh-ye Khorma)	212
Spinach, Prune, and Lamb Braise (Khoresh-e Esfenaj-o Alu)	168
Sumac Grilled Fish (Mahi-e Kababi ba Somaq)	213
Sweet-and-Sour Kabob (Kabab-e Torsh)	188
Sweet-and-Sour Stuffed Chicken (Morgh-e Tu Por-e Torsh-o Shirin)	205
Unripe Grape, Chicken, and Eggplant Braise (Khoresh-e Bademjan)	180

Pickles and Preserves

☞ Barberry Preserve (Moraba-ye Zereshk)	229
☞ Black Carrot Quick Pickle (Torshi-e Gazar)	225
☞ Carrot Preserve (Moraba-ye Havij)	230
☞ Fig Preserve (Moraba-ye Anjir)	231
☞ Garlic Pickle (Torshi-e Seer)	223
☞ Mixed Vegetable Pickle (Torshi-e Liteh)	220
☞ Onion, Cucumber, and Coriander Quick Pickle (Torshi Hazeri-e Piaz)	226
☞ Onion Pickle (Torshi-e Piaz)	222
☞ Quince Preserve (Moraba-ye Beh)	228
☞ Rose Petal Preserve (Moraba-ye Gol)	232
☞ Sour Cherry Preserve (Moraba-ye Albalu)	227
☞ Spicy Lime Pickle (Torshi-e Limu)	224

Breads and Street Foods

☞ Barbari Bread (Nan-e Barbari)	258
☞ Charcoal-Roasted Corn on the Cob (Balal)	267
☞ Hot Fava Beans in the Pod (Baqala Pokhteh)	266
☞ Lavash Bread (Nan-e Lavash)	260
☞ Roasted Beets (Labu)	265
☞ Stone-Baked Bread (Nan-e Sangak)	262
☞ Sweet Sesame Buns (Nan-e Komaj)	264

Desserts

🍪 Almond Cookies (Nan-e Badami)	237
🍪 Baklava (Baqlava)	241
🍪 Carrot and Walnut Halva (Halva-ye Havij)	252
🍪 Chickpea Cookies (Nan-e Nokhodchi)	235
🍪 Honey Almond Brittle (Sohan Asal)	246
🍪 Paradise Custard (Yakh dar Behesht)	249
🍪 Pistachio Cake (Kayk-e Pesteh)	240
🍪 Raisin Cookies (Nan-e Keshmeshy)	238
🍪 Rice Cookies (Nan-e Berenji)	234
🍪 Rice Stick Sorbet with Sour Cherries (Paludeh-ye Shirazi)	255
🍪 Saffron Ice Cream (Bastani-e Gol-o Bolbol)	253
🍪 Saffron Rice Pudding (Sholeh Zard)	248
🍪 Saffroned Marzipan (Loz-e Badam)	244
🍪 Saffroned Wheat Halva (Halva)	250
🍪 Sprouted Wheat Flour, Date, and Walnut Pie (Komaj-e Sen)	245
🍪 Yazdi Cupcakes (Cayk-e Yazdi)	239

Drinks

☕ Coffee (Qahveh)	272
🍷 Sour Cherry Sherbet (Sharbat-e Albalu)	275
☕ Tea (Chai)	271
🍷 Vinegar and Mint Sherbet (Sharbat-e Sekanjebin)	274
🍷 Yogurt and Mint Drink (Dugh)	273

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	2
Foolish Assumptions	4
Icons Used in This Book	4
Beyond the Book	4
Where to Go from Here	5
PART 1: GETTING STARTED WITH PERSIAN COOKING	7
CHAPTER 1: Exploring Persian Culture through Food	9
Going Back to the Beginning	10
Having some give and take with China, India, and Turkey	10
Seeing how the Arabs introduced Persian food to North Africa and Europe	11
Identifying the influence of Islamic dietary restrictions	12
Recognizing the similarities and differences from region to region	12
Understanding the philosophy behind Persian cooking	13
Eating Persian-Style	13
CHAPTER 2: Tools of the Trade	15
Pots and Pans	15
Nonstick pot	15
Braiser	16
Saucepan with lid	17
Wide skillet	17
Crêpe pan	17
Roasting pan	17
Sheet pan	17
Knives and Other Cutting Tools	18
Other Miscellaneous Tools	19
Kitchen Appliances	20
CHAPTER 3: Shopping for Essential Ingredients	23
Meat, Poultry, and Fish	24
Lamb	24
Chicken	24
Fish	24

Dairy and Eggs	25
Milk	25
Yogurt	25
Kashk	25
Cheese	26
Eggs	26
Produce	26
Fruits	26
Vegetables	27
Herbs	27
Fats	27
Pantry Items	28
Flour	28
Rice	28
Noodles	29
Legumes	29
Tomato and tamarind pastes	29
Molasses	30
Nuts	30
Pickles and preserves	30
Canned goods	30
Aromatics	30
Tea and coffee	31
Flavorings and Garnishes	31
Spices	31
Sugar	32
Vinegar	32
Verjuice	32
Edible leaves and flowers	33

PART 2: GETTING COMFORTABLE IN THE KITCHEN 35

CHAPTER 4: Common Persian Kitchen Techniques 37

Peeling Away the Unappealing Parts	38
Tomatoes	38
Butternut squash	39
Eggplants	40
Ginger and garlic	40
Cutting Vegetables Like a Pro	41
Washing and Drying Fresh Herbs	43
Cleaning and Washing Barberries	43
Caramelizing Ingredients for Flavor	44
Orange peel	45
Barberries	45
Onions	46

Toasting Nuts and Noodles	46
Nuts	46
Noodles	47
Frying Onions	47
Making a Mint Garnish	48
Removing Bitterness	49
Eggplants	49
Orange peel	50
Seeding and Juicing Pomegranates	50
Seeding a pomegranate	50
Juicing a pomegranate	51
Soaking Ingredients to Remove Impurities and for Tenderness	52
Legumes	52
Persian shallots	52
Dried herbs	53
Dried Persian limes	54
Making Kabobs Sizzle	55
Smoking Vegetables	56
Eggplants	57
Butternut squash	57
Making and Using Ghee	58
Making Panir	58
Making and Thickening Yogurt	59
Making yogurt	59
Thickening store-bought yogurt	60
Making kashk	61
CHAPTER 5: Using Staple Ingredients in Persian Dishes	63
Adjusting Seasoning to Taste	63
Understanding the Five Basic Tastes	64
Digging into Common Ingredients in Persian Cooking	65
Barberries	65
Bitter oranges	66
Date molasses	66
Dried fruits	66
Garlic	66
Ginger	67
Grape molasses	67
Grapes (unripe)	67
Herbs (fresh or dried)	67
Limes (fresh and dried)	68
Onions	68
Pomegranate molasses	68

Sumac	68
Tamarind.....	68
Tomatoes (fresh, canned, or paste)	69
Vinegar	69
Verjuice	69
CHAPTER 6: Delicately Spicing the Persian Way.....	71
Blooming Saffron.....	71
Making Your Own Advieh (Persian Spice Mix).....	73
Cooking with Persian Hogweed.....	74
Grinding and Toasting Spices	75
CHAPTER 7: Bringing It All Together in a Persian Meal.....	77
Sampling Several Persian Menus, for Every Occasion	78
A weeknight dinner.....	78
A party for guests	80
Jazzing Up the Look of Your Dishes	82
PART 3: APPETIZERS AND FIRST COURSES.....	83
CHAPTER 8: Healthy Yogurt Vegetable Dishes, Salads, and Sides	85
CHAPTER 9: Egg-xotic Egg Dishes.....	99
CHAPTER 10: Fill 'er Up! Stuffed Vegetables	111
CHAPTER 11: Warm and Hearty Soups and Porridge.....	121
PART 4: MAIN COURSES.....	135
CHAPTER 12: Rice Is a Very Nice Dish	137
Choosing the Right Type of Rice	137
Washing the Rice	138
Choosing the Right Pot.....	139
Cooking the Rice	139
CHAPTER 13: Practicing Patience for Braises.....	163
CHAPTER 14: Sticking It to Kabobs and Roasts.....	181
CHAPTER 15: Savoring Meatballs, Patties, and Casseroles.....	195
CHAPTER 16: Fixing Fish Entrees.....	207

PART 5: SIDE DISHES, DESSERTS, AND OTHER DELIGHTS	217
CHAPTER 17: Pickles and Preserves	219
CHAPTER 18: Pastries, Sweets, and Candies	233
CHAPTER 19: Delicious Desserts	247
CHAPTER 20: Breads and Street Food	257
CHAPTER 21: Thirst-Quenching Beverages	269
PART 6: THE PART OF TENS	277
CHAPTER 22: Ten (or So) Time-Saving Tips for the Kitchen	279
Figure Out the Proper Prep Order	279
Wash and Chop Herbs	280
Clean and Wash Barberries	280
Soak Legumes	281
Peel Garlic	281
Cook Crispy Fried Onions in Batches	281
Store Your Spices Efficiently	281
Choose the Right Size Pan and Use a Lid	282
Use a Rice Cooker, Multicooker, Food Processor, and Electric Mixer	282
CHAPTER 23: Ten Myths about Persian Cooking	283
Persian Food Is Different from Iranian Food	283
Persian Cooking Doesn't Fit with Modern Cooking Practices	284
Persian Food Is Only Kabobs	284
Persian Food Is Unhealthy	284
Persian Food Is Fattening	284
Persian Food Doesn't Look Good	285
Persian Food Takes Too Long to Cook	285
Persian Food Is Too Complicated to Make	285
Persian Food Is Expensive to Make	285
Persian Restaurants Represent Persian Cooking	285
CHAPTER 24: Ten Tips on Persian Table Manners	287
Eat with a Spoon and Maybe a Fork (not a Knife)	287
Use Your Hands, Especially with Bone-in Kabobs	288
Use a Serving Utensil to Pick Up Food from a Communal Plate	288
Don't Double-Dip	288

Don't Load Up Your plate	289
Show Appreciation to Your Host	289
If You Are the Host, Welcome Each Guest Individually and with Respect	289
Be Grateful to Your Host	289
Wash Your Hands	290
Don't Leave Too Early or Too Late	290
APPENDIX: METRIC CONVERSION GUIDE	291
INDEX	295

Introduction

Cooking Persian food is based on a philosophy reaching back to ancient times. Thousands of years ago, Zoroaster elaborated the ancient myth of the twins. One became good; the other, evil. One, the follower of truth; the other, of falsehood. This concept of duality is typically Persian, and it extends beyond moral issues. Persians often balance light and darkness, sweet and sour, hot and cold. The philosophy is both a science and an art. Increasingly, science is discovering links between food and health. And although the ancient Persian system of balance does not eliminate the need for doctors, it is an excellent nutritional adjunct to good health. For Persians, food is medicine. In fact, the word for a spice mix in Persian, *advieh*, means “medicine.”

These days, you can find Persian kitchen staples at almost every grocery store. For example, recently, I’ve found rose water and pomegranate molasses at my local supermarket! And what’s more, with the Internet, you can complete your Persian pantry with the click of a button. Hooray!

This book is intended for those who are new to Persian food, as well as for those who enjoy having creative fun in the kitchen. I hope it will serve as a key that unlocks all the secrets of Persian cooking for you. I’m excited for you to get together with family and friends and use this book to cook, tell jokes, and eat and drink as Iranians have done for thousands of years.

PERSIA OR IRAN?

Iran and *Persia* refer to the same place. These days, the word *Iran* is used to refer to the country and the word *Persia* or *Persian* is used to refer to the culture (like Persian carpets, Persian cats, and, of course, Persian food). Persian, also called Farsi, is the language of Iran.

About This Book

If you haven't eaten Persian food and you'd like to give it a try in your own kitchen, but you don't know where to begin, this is the book for you! Come join me on a voyage of culinary discovery, along a path that stretches through the ages, across Iran from the Caspian Sea in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south. In this book, I help you master basic techniques, use spices delicately, and stock your pantry with key ingredients that may be new to you.

In this book, you discover how to cook rice, the jewel of Persian cooking, with a golden crust, known as *tahdig*. You become confident about the building blocks of *khores*, a Persian braise that has a depth of flavor. I also show you how to cook a range of different Persian vegetarian dishes that can be served as side dishes to the main course, creating a feast! If you're vegetarian or vegan, I offer options at the end of many of the recipes throughout this book, too.

This book includes my family's favorite recipes — I hope they become yours, too! The recipes in this book help you put together various menus to please everyone. Think of this book as a road map that will guide and lead you to your destination of a perfect Persian meal. You can refer to it on a need-to-know basis and skip through pages to learn about Persian food culture.

Here are my recommendations to guide you through this book:

- » Stock your pantry with the basic ingredients you need for cooking Persian food. Some of the recipes in this book need special ingredients that can be found at Persian markets or on the Internet. Good news: You need only three basic seasonings for Persian cooking — salt, pepper, and turmeric — along with a Persian spice mix called *advieh* (see Chapter 6). **Note:** You don't need to make homemade *advieh* every time you cook; store-bought *advieh* (including my own, called Najmieh's Advieh, and available at <https://persianbasket.com/advieh-najmieh-batmanglij-s-persian-spice-mix.html>) works, too.
- » Read the entire recipe before you begin to cook to make sure you have all the ingredients. If you don't have some ingredients, no need to panic — you can easily find replacements in your kitchen. For example, you can substitute yellow split peas for mung beans because they have similar cooking times. Fresh tomatoes can be replaced with canned tomatoes, and fresh sour cherries can be replaced with dried or frozen ones. You can even replace dried barberries, a specialty of Persian cooking, with dried unsweetened cranberries.

- » Setting out your prepared ingredients (known as *mise en place* in French) is standard practice in professional kitchens, but I recommend it for anyone who wants to cook with less hassle. If the recipe calls for, say, peeled tomatoes or chopped herbs, you'll be more efficient if you have these items prepared and ready to go before you begin cooking.
- » You'll need basic equipment for Persian cooking, including a nonstick pot for cooking *tahdig*, a good skillet or frying pan, and a wooden spatula to prevent scratching nonstick pots. (Chapter 2 walks you through all the tools you need.)
- » Personalize the recipes to suit your tastes. This practice comes naturally when you have confidence in the kitchen. If you're new to cooking in general, give yourself time — you'll get there!
- » An everyday Persian meal is made up of rice, braise, and small side dishes, such as yogurt-based salads. A platter of fresh herbs, cheese, and flatbread always accompany a Persian meal. Most of my recipes are made for four to six people — you'll have plenty of food, but if you're planning to cook for more than six people, you can scale up your recipe. As a rule, if you're doubling a recipe, double the spices as well. If you're more than doubling a recipe, I recommend initially going easy on the spices and then adjusting them to your taste at the end of your cooking.
- » All recipes have English titles followed by the original Persian titles in parentheses.
- » All oven temperatures are in Fahrenheit, but the Appendix at the back of the book provides conversions to Celsius.
- 🍅 Vegetarian recipes are marked with the tomato icon in the Recipes in This Book (after the Table of Contents), as well as in the Recipes in This Chapter list (at the beginning of every chapter). For nonvegetarian recipes, when possible, I include tips on altering the recipes to make them vegetarian — you can find that information at the ends of the recipes.

Finally, within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and you want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, I made a few assumptions about you, the reader:

- » You've tasted Persian food at a Persian restaurant and you want to make it in your own kitchen.
- » You're interested in cooking and you have some experience with it. (If you're totally new to cooking, I recommend starting with *Cooking Basics For Dummies*, 5th Edition, by Bryan Miller and Marie Rama [Wiley].)
- » You're curious and want to learn about Persian food and interested in familiarizing yourself with unfamiliar ingredients.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, you see icons in the margins. Here's what each icon means:



TIP

The Tip icon highlights information that will make your life easier — in the kitchen, at least!



REMEMBER

Whenever I tell you something so important that you should commit it to memory, I use the Remember icon.



WARNING

When you see the Warning icon, be extra careful — the information here will help prevent something from going wrong.



CULTURAL
WISDOM

Persian food is an integral part of Persian culture. I use the Cultural Wisdom icon to highlight some cultural information that can enrich your experience of Persian cuisine.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this book comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that includes tips on how to buy key Persian ingredients (such as good-quality basmati rice, dried barberries, saffron, pomegranates,

grapes, date molasses, and yellow split peas), Persian cooking tools and techniques, and how to build a *khoresh*. To get this Cheat Sheet, go to www.dummies.com and type **Persian Cooking For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the search box.

Where to Go from Here

If you're new to Persian cooking, I recommend starting with Part 2, which is all about common Persian cooking techniques, how to use Persian ingredients, how to build a *khoresh*, and how to bring a meal together. Parts 3 and 4 guide you to building your own menus — you'll find everything you need, from appetizers to desserts.

You don't need to create a feast the first time you make a Persian meal. Just try one recipe, and then build on your repertoire from there. The key is to have fun!

I hope this book serves as a key that unlocks all the secrets of Persian cooking for you. I'm excited for you to get together with family and friends and use this book to cook, tell jokes, and eat and drink as Iranians have done for thousands of years. *Nush-e joon!* (This traditional wish in Persian is similar to *bon appétit* in French. It means, "May the food be nourishing.")

1

Getting Started with Persian Cooking

IN THIS PART . . .

Look at the history of Persian cooking.

Discover the essential kitchen tools for Persian cooking and how to use them.

Stock your kitchen with the special ingredients needed for Persian cooking and find out how to use them.

- » Surveying a few thousand years of Persian cooking at a glance
- » Understanding how Persian meals are served

Chapter **1**

Exploring Persian Culture through Food

Every country expresses itself in food — the meals and casual delights created from what grows in its soil, swims in its seas, and grazes on its fields. Yet food is so much more than sustenance. In ways both subtle and powerful, it maintains bonds of family, friends, communities, and entire societies.

I was born in Iran, but I've lived away from it for the past 40 years, researching and writing cookbooks about Persian cuisine in exile. A few years ago, I wanted to renew my ties directly and went back to Iran to see and see again the amazing markets; meet cooks and restaurateurs; and share kitchens, tables, tastes, and scents that convey the very essence of Persian cooking. This book is the simplified, yet authentic result.

You know more about Persian food than you may think. When you ask for oranges, pistachios, spinach, or saffron, you're using words derived from Persian that refer to foods either originating in the region or introduced from there, because Persia was a great trading center of the ancient and medieval worlds. The land was the first home of many common herbs, from basil to cilantro, as well as scores of familiar preparations, including sweet-and-sour sauces, kabobs, and almond pastries.

In this chapter, I walk you through the long history of Persian cooking (in just a few pages!) and introduce you to the way in which Persian meals are served.

Going Back to the Beginning

Kingdoms had risen and fallen for thousands of years before the Persians arrived in the plateau known as Iran. Ancient Persians inherited the civilizations of the past; they absorbed and transformed the arts of Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam (present-day southwestern Iran).

The Persians had their kings of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE to thank for their famous royal kitchens and love of food. Darius the Great paid attention to agriculture and urged the transport of seeds and plants. To feed the famed Persian horses, alfalfa seeds were exported to Greece. To feed humans (and for pleasure), plants were transported from province to province — rice was imported from China and India, sesame from Babylon to Egypt, fruit trees from Persia to Anatolia, and pistachios from Persia to Syria.

We know from the fifth century BCE Elamite clay administrative archives discovered in the 1930s in southwestern Iran, that ancient Persians used many herbs and spices, such as cardamom, celery, cumin, dill, mustard seeds, saffron, and sesame. The ration register also includes both fresh and dried fruit and nuts, such as almonds, apples, dates, figs, mulberries, pears, and pistachios, which confirms Iranians' love and use of these herbs, spices, fruits, and nuts for more than 2,500 years.

The royal courts of two ancient Persian empires, a thousand years apart, were famous for their cuisines. Today, we would call them “foodies.” What we know about Persian food is from archaeological kitchen tools; architecture, miniature painting, and poetry; linguistics; and old texts and cookbooks. Several cookbooks were written in Arabic during the tenth century, but we know that many of the recipes were borrowed from Persian royal kitchens of the sixth century and later taken to Europe by the Arabs.

The great ancient trade routes that are now called the Silk Road connected China to Italy with Iran at its center. As a result, Iran looked both east and west and became the trading center of the ancient world. Thus, Persia both influenced and was influenced by the culture and cuisines that existed between the Mediterranean in the west and China in the east.

Having some give and take with China, India, and Turkey

Rice, which was cultivated in China and India 5,000 years ago, seems to have reached Persia only in the 4th century BCE, but it did not become an important part of Persian cooking until the 15th century. Since then, rice has become not so

much the anchor of a meal (the way it is in China), but the basis of festive and elaborate dishes called *polows*. Like other popular dishes, *polows* have spread far beyond their Persian source. Under such related names as *pullao*, *pilavi*, *pilaf*, and *pilau*, they grace celebrations from Afghanistan to Albania, and from India to Turkey.

Noodles and noodle dishes are often associated with Chinese and Italian cooking. In fact, according to legend, Marco Polo brought noodles from China to Italy in the 13th century. Today, however, food scholars agree that pasta probably originated in Persia. In fact, it was the Arabs who introduced noodles, and the hard durum wheat necessary for making it, from Persia to Italy in the ninth century via Sicily and Genoa. No one knows exactly how the technique for making pasta reached China. What can be said with certainty is that before the Han Dynasty in the second century BCE, China lacked the mills, which the Iranians had, for large-scale grinding of the durum wheat used to make pasta.

In the second century BCE, a Chinese imperial guard called Zhang Qian, was sent west on a diplomatic mission. In Persia, he discovered and took back to China not only the domesticated seeds of grapes (for making wine) and alfalfa (for feeding horses), but also such exotica as broad beans, coriander, cucumber, pomegranates, sesame, and walnuts.

Later, Persian cooking, already international, helped to influence the conquering Arabs of the 7th century and the Mongols of the 13th century. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, the Mongols, who later ruled parts of India, took both Persian cooking and the Persian language to India. Today, kabobs, *koofteh*, *biriyani*, and korma in Indian cooking all show the influence of Persian cooking.

During this period, Persian cooking also greatly influenced the cuisines of Mughal India and Ottoman Turkey. We know that the Ottoman Empire invited Persian chefs to cook in their royal kitchens. Today, what is called “Ottoman cuisine” in Turkey is very similar to Persian cooking, and many of the names of dishes still show their Persian origins.

Seeing how the Arabs introduced Persian food to North Africa and Europe

You might think that the conquest of Persia by the Arab armies in 637 would end the rich Persian civilization and trade, because the desert warriors were rough men and nomads. But instead, within a few generations, the conquerors were building new cities in the circular style of the Persians, constructing buildings with the vaulted domes and courtyards, absorbing and extending Persian scholarship, wearing Persian-style clothes, drinking Persian wine, eating Persian food,

and writing cookbooks that included Persian recipes in Arabic. Persia provided the model for the splendid centuries known as the Golden Age of Islam (from the 8th to the 14th centuries). The Arabs introduced Persian cooking ingredients and techniques to North Africa and Europe. These exchanges formed a culinary bond — a sign of early and peaceful communication — that linked distant and sometimes hostile cultures.

Identifying the influence of Islamic dietary restrictions

Before the Arabs arrived, Persians were Zoroastrians (followers of one of the world's oldest religions — one that influenced not only Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but also Buddhism and Greek philosophy) and were wine makers and drinkers.

Wine was an integral part of the Persian culture, and all Zoroastrian ceremonies included drinking wine. However, with the arrival of Islam, wine was forbidden, and Islamic dietary restrictions were imposed on Persians. The consumption of alcohol, pork, and some seafood were forbidden for believers of the faith. Additionally, the concept of *halal* (an Islamic method of slaughtering animals, very similar to kosher in Judaism) was introduced to Persians.

Recognizing the similarities and differences from region to region

Iran is a big country, highly diverse in climate and terrain, with mountain ranges, grasslands, and deserts. Seas lie to the north and south. Here and there are great cities where many cultures mingle. These regions have distinctly different climates, and until the advent of modern transportation, each had its own local ingredients and food culture.

Every region in Iran has its own style of cooking. But certain basic themes remain. For instance, yogurt and its by-product, *kashk* (fermented sun-dried yogurt) is used all over Iran, but in northwest Iran, yogurt is more prevalent, whereas in central Iran *kashk* is more common. Fruit and its molasses are used in recipes all over Iran, but pomegranate and citrus are the souring agent of choice in northern Iran, whereas tamarind and dried lime are popular in southern Iran and vinegar is popular in central Iran.