

Biryani

serves 2 – 3

(when accompanied by a mixed vegetable curry)

The biryani originated in Persia and, at its simplest, was rice and meat baked together in the oven. The cooks to the Moghul emperors took the biryani and transformed it into a courtly delicacy by adding aromatic spices and other exotic ingredients.

One of the most elaborate biryanis was created in honour of the emperor Shah Jahan. Containing around 50 ingredients it is not something you can knock up in a hurry! It consists of saffron infused layers of spiced rice and meat which has been cooked in a special masala containing many different spices and other ingredients. The layered biryani is then baked in the oven so all the flavours can permeate the rice and the finished dish is garnished with nuts, rose petals and edible silver leaf known as “vark”.

Now, your average high street curry house is not going to have the resources to produce such a complex dish with or without silver leaf on the top. All restaurant dishes are made to order so the chef has to find a way of preparing the biryani in double quick time. At its most basic the restaurant biryani is pilau rice stir fried with chicken or lamb which has been cooked as an extra dry bhuna. The rice will be pre-cooked, as will the chicken or lamb, so the final dish just involves stir frying everything together in a karahi along with aromatic spices.

We home cooks have the edge on the poor restaurant chef in as much as we do have time to prepare the rice and the meat and then bake the biryani in the oven in the traditional way. In fact, it helps us immensely because we can cook the accompanying mixed vegetable curry and any dhals or breads while the biryani is in the oven.

Don't be put off by the long list of ingredients and the lengthy instructions for the biryani. The recipe is not difficult but you do need to be methodical in the preparation. Remember that everything can be done in advance and just needs to be put together to bake in the oven. It is ideal for impressing that “special person” because not only does it look and taste fantastic but it needs no last minute cooking.

The garnishes are an important part of the biryani so please don't leave them out. You have a choice which onions you use – either fresh spring onions or ready-fried crispy onion slices. Don't bother trying to cook your own crispy onions. It takes ages and they never come out really crispy in my experience. I

prefer to use the crispy onions but, when I can't get hold of any or when I want a fresher taste, I use spring onions instead.

A restaurant biryani is usually served with a [mixed vegetable curry](#) to add a little juiciness to what is otherwise a rather dry dish.

ingredients

rice

125g of *best quality* Basmati rice.

Buy the best you can afford; preferably not supermarket own label and definitely **not** brown Basmati. You want snowy white grains of pure Basmati rice. **Do not wash the rice or soak it.**

filling – choose from :

[chicken](#)

[lamb](#)

[king prawn](#)

[mushroom](#)

garnishes

1 × 15ml spoon chopped fresh coriander leaves and fine stalks

2 × 15ml spoons sultanas

2 × 15ml spoons flaked almonds

2 spring onions **or** 2 × 15ml spoons from a pack of ready-fried crispy onion slices

for frying the cooked rice

2 × 5ml spoons groundnut oil

2 pieces cassia bark about 20mm x 7mm each

4 cloves

2 green cardamon pods

salt

method

boiling the rice

1. Boil as much water as possible, **without any salt**, in a large saucepan (a 22cm pan is ideal). Leave just enough room at the top for the water to lightly boil without spilling over the sides of the pan.
2. Gradually sprinkle the Basmati rice into the pan and stir round very gently to make sure no grains are stuck together. Bring the water back to the boil, stir gently again. Do not cover.
3. Simmer so the water is only just bubbling (absolutely NOT a brisk boil). Simmer the rice until it is almost cooked. It must still be "al dente" as the Italians say about pasta. Try a grain after 11, 12, 13 minutes etc.
4. Drain the rice through a large sieve or colander until the water has stopped dripping through. Gently tip out the rice onto a large cold plate. Spread the rice out gently with a fork and leave to get cool.
5. Once the rice has cooled to room temperature cover the plate with cling film and refrigerate the rice. Do NOT leave rice out in a warm room as it can host some very nasty bugs.
6. **N.B.** the rice **must** be cold before you start frying it.

filling

1. Make the filling of your choice according to the instructions.
2. You can use the filling straight after cooking it or you can cool the filling down to room temperature and refrigerate it until needed.

preparing the garnishes

1. Finely chop the coriander leaves and fine stalks and measure out 15ml.
2. Put the sultanas into a small bowl and cover with boiling water. Leave for at least 15 minutes to swell up.
3. Heat up a small frying pan to a medium heat and add the flaked almonds. Dry roast the flaked almonds and flip them over from time to time with a palette knife. Cook until both sides of the almonds flakes are a light golden brown. Tip out the almond flakes onto a plate.
4. Trim the roots off the spring onions and slice them at an angle so you get oval shaped pieces. If you are using ready-fried crispy onion slices just open the pack!

frying the rice and whole spices

1. The next step is to fry the rice but this stage can be done hours after boiling the rice, making the filling and preparing the garnishes. Remember to refrigerate the rice and the filling and cover the garnishes to prevent them drying out.
2. **N.B.** the rice must be cold before you start frying it.
3. Heat the oil in a large karahi or wok on a medium heat.
4. Add the cassia, cloves and cardamoms and wait until the cardamoms and cloves start to swell up.
5. Turn the heat down to medium-low and tip the cold, boiled rice into the wok. Gently stir the rice around in the wok with a metal spoon and coat the grains with oil. Gently break up any lumps of rice with the edge of the spoon. Add salt to taste.
6. Fry the rice for a few minutes stirring constantly to prevent it sticking to the base of the wok.

constructing the biryani

1. Pre-heat the oven to Gas mark 3 / 170°C
2. Select an oven-proof casserole dish which is attractive enough to take to table for serving. It needs to be about 20cm in diameter.
3. Put half the rice into the casserole dish and smooth down to make a flat bed. Take whatever filling you have chosen along with all its spicy coating and evenly distribute it over the layer of rice. Now cover the filling with the rest of the rice and, again, smooth down to give a flat top.
4. Drain the water off the sultanas and sprinkle the sultanas and spring onion slices (if using) evenly over the top of the rice. Cover the casserole dish with a lid or kitchen foil.
5. Place the dish on the middle shelf of the oven and bake for 30 minutes or until the biryani is piping hot all the way through. Make the [mixed vegetable curry](#) while the biryani is cooking in the oven.
6. 3 minutes before the end of the cooking remove the lid or foil and sprinkle the toasted almonds, chopped coriander leaf and, if using, the crispy onions over the biryani. Return the casserole to the oven but leave off the lid for the last 3 minutes.
7. Prepare to impress your guest.



Please respect the work that has gone into creating and writing The Curry House. The content on curryhouse.co.uk is for private use only. Do not post this recipe to public forums or publish it on another website, in print or through broadcast media.

© David W Smith
2004 -2012
all rights reserved
Biryani
[Index](#)