



The Culinary Culture of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in the Middle East.¹ Most of the population (90-95%) is Sh'i' Muslim, and this is also the state religion.² The diet and culinary traditions are influenced by this faith as well as the food native to the area.² Due to Iran's location and the history of the Persian Empire, the food culture has been influenced by many other countries, including Russia, India, and China¹

Muslim Dietary Considerations

- **Halal:** used to describe allowed foods in the Muslim diet.⁵ Foods are considered Halal based on how they are processed, and obtained, among other factors.⁵
- **Haram:** used to describe foods that are not allowed.⁵ Pork, pork products, alcohol, and meats that are not slaughtered following Halal practices are haram.⁵
- **Ramadan:** A month of fasting from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk.⁴

Traditional Foods

- Bread is served with most meals and is often used as utensil as well.⁵
- Rice is prepared in a variety of ways.⁵ It may be cooked with vegetables or meat and fruit.⁶ Rice is served as a side dish or a main dish.⁶ Rice is consumed daily in Iran, as a part of most meals.⁷
- Lamb and chicken are used more widely than beef.
- Iran's national dish: chelow-kabab, which is cooked rice served with kebab.⁵
- Meat and vegetable stews (khoresht) which are often served with rice.⁶
- Spices commonly used include: mint, saffron, parsley, cinnamon, cardamom and turmeric.⁶
- A pomegranate walnut stew (fesenjan) is served at weddings.⁶ This is a historic stew, with beginnings traced back as far as 515 BC.⁶



Eating Patterns

- Breakfast is not a large meal and may be skipped.²
- The midday meal is the most important meal of the day and often centers around rice.⁷
- Dinner may be eaten after 8pm.²
- Historically, utensils were used infrequently, but the Westernization of Iranian culture has introduced utensils as common. Bread may still be used as a utensil, for scooping stews and rice.⁵

Traditional Health Beliefs

- Ancient school inspired by the Quran with belief rooted in preventative medicine.
- Eight essential “foods” can promote overall well being and help prevent disease.⁸
- Oral: Anything one eats or drinks. To stay well, these should all be Halal.⁸
- Imaginary: Individual thought influences wellness, therefore positive thoughts will lead to better health.⁸
- Auditory: Sounds of nature, peaceful music, and worship names of God are considered positive auditory food.⁸ The sounds of traffic, sirens and curse words and negative.⁸
- Visual: Natural scenes are thought to be positive visual food while viewing garbage brings about negative effects.⁸
- Olfactory: The scents of natural things like flowers are beneficial while chemicals are thought to bring about brain disorders.⁸
- Touch: Cotton and linen clothing are recommended and wool and chemical clothes are forbidden.⁸
- Sexual: A healthy human should be able to express themselves sexually.⁸
- Familiarity: Having companionship with family and friends is thought to be good and prevent diseases, while social isolation has negative effects on mental health.⁸

Iranian Traditions in the United States

- Iranian food is often called Persian in the US.⁵
- Iranians often prepare traditional dishes while in the US.⁵
- Iran has had Western influence in present day, including the opening of some fast food restaurants and food courts that include global food options.⁵

References

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