The Culinary Culture of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in the Middle East.¹ Most of the population (90-95%) is Shi’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.³ Foods are considered Halal based on how they are processed, and obtained, among other factors.³
- **Haram:** used to describe foods that are not allowed.³ Pork, pork products, alcohol, and meats that are not slaughtered following Halal practices are haram.³
- **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: chilaw-kabab, which is cooked rice served with kebab.⁵
- Meat and vegetable stews (khorest) 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 beliefs rooted in preventative medicine.
- Eight essential “foods” can promote overall well being and help prevent disease.
- Oral: Anything one eats or drinks. To stay well, these should all be Halal.
- Imaginary: Individual thought influences wellness, therefore positive thoughts will lead to better health.
- Auditory: Sounds of nature, peaceful music, and worship names of God are considered positive auditory food. The sounds of traffic, sirens and curse words and negative.
- Visual: Natural scenes are thought to be positive visual food while viewing garbage brings about negative effects.
- Olfactory: The scents of natural things like flowers are beneficial while chemicals are thought to bring about brain disorders.
- Touch: Cotton and linen clothing are recommended and wool and chemical clothes are forbidden.
- Sexual: A healthy human should be able to express themselves sexually.
- Familiarity: Having companionship with family and friends is thought to be good and prevent diseases, while social isolation has negative effects on mental health.

Iranian Traditions in the United States

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

References