

The Beauty of Basmati

Amira proves that rice can be so much more than just a side dish

WE ALL KNOW the softly simmering beauty of a curry, the delight that a flawless mixture of spices can offer in creating of a bold and flavoursome curry. However, the perfect curry is only as good as its partner. For some this can be found in naan or chapattis but for many people, rice is the only conceivable accompaniment to a well-made curry. When considering rice, there is one that shines above all others and has achieved almost legendary status - basmati.

Curry and basmati rice share a long and beautiful history together. Various curries, such as tikka masala, vindaloo and korma, have received widespread adoration in Britain for some time. From culinary classes to dinner tables, basmati rice is often deprived

“AN AGING PERIOD OF EIGHTEEN MONTHS ENSURES THE FINEST QUALITY BASMATI RICE.”

of the praise it deserves as the perfect accompaniment to a fine meal.

Deriving its name from the Sanskrit word for “fragrant one”, basmati is known for its distinctive, sweet aroma and has played an integral part in Indian and Pakistani cuisine for thousands of years. In recent times basmati rice has seen an explosion in popularity outside of its traditional home in the Indian subcontinent, gaining ever increasing status in countries like the Middle East, West Africa and here in the UK.

Pure basmati is grown in the foothills of the Himalayas and there are several factors that set basmati apart as the golden standard of rice. One of the crucial points is the aging process, in order to create the distinctive taste and aroma of basmati, the grains must be aged for longer periods of time than other rice varieties. While the average aging period for the basmati you buy in the UK’s supermarkets is around nine months, some premium rice producers age their basmati rice for a minimum of eighteen months. This ensures the finest quality rice and draws out the elegance and beauty of the long white grain. One of

the newest rice brands on the supermarket shelf, Amira, does just this - meaning it offers the highest quality rice to go with a well crafted curry. As well as its boundless culinary potential, basmati also has significant health benefits thanks to its low Glycemic Index (GI) in comparison to other complex carbohydrates such as white bread and potatoes.

Amira’s basmati is grown across the towns of Badaun and Unnao in Utter Pradesh, India’s most populous state. Their products take advantage of the region’s renowned fertile land, where the rice crops are nourished by the holy rivers Ganges and Yamuna. The company is led by CEO and Chairman, Karan A. Chanana, the fourth-generation leader of this 99 year old family business. Amira brings a wealth of flavour, acquired through almost a century of experience, into their delicious basmati.

Given the luxurious and healthy nature of Amira rice, it comes as no surprise that the business has grown from strength to strength and is now available in

supermarkets and delis across the UK. Amira is both a luxurious and nutritious culinary delight and is the perfect partner to the wonder that is a fantastic curry. <



MIDDLE EASTERN CLOVE AND CARDAMOM SCENTED RICE

with Caramelized Red Onions, Green Lentils & Griddled Halloumi

Serves: 4

INGREDIENTS

250g Amira Superior Aromatic rice
 250g flat green lentils
 3 large red onions, finely sliced
 2 tbsp olive oil
 50g butter
 1 tsp whole cloves
 1 tsp cardamom pods, bruised open
 1 cinnamon stick
 1 tsp dried chilli flakes (optional)
 3 cloves garlic, crushed
 450ml vegetable stock
 2 packs halloumi cheese, cut into 1cm slices
 A little olive oil for brushing
 2 red chillies, finely sliced
 1 small bunch shallots, finely chopped
 salt & freshly ground black pepper

HOW TO COOK

- Rinse the Amira rice well under cold running water and tip into a bowl. Cover with cold water and set aside to soak for 30 minutes
- Tip the lentils into a small saucepan and cover well with cold water. Bring up to the boil and simmer rapidly for 10-12 minutes until they are just tender but with plenty of bite. Drain and set aside.

- Add the oil and butter to a large deep frying pan and set over a low heat, stirring through the onions, cloves, cardamom pods, cinnamon and chilli flakes. Fry very gently, stirring well to coat the onions, for around 30 minutes until meltingly soft and lightly caramelized. Stir through the garlic and for just a minute. Drain the rice well and add to the pan along with the onions, stirring well to coat the onions. Add the cooked lentils and pour in the stock, season with a little salt and pepper and bring up to the boil. Reduce the heat, cover tightly with a lid or snug fitting sheet of foil and simmer gently for 12 minutes. Turn off the heat and leave to rest, covered and undisturbed, for a further 10 minutes.
- Whilst the rice is resting, heat a griddle pan until smoking hot. Brush the halloumi lightly with olive oil and cook for a couple of minutes on both sides until crisp, then chop roughly into bite sized pieces.
- Remove the lid from the rice and fork through to fluff up and separate the grains. Taste to check the seasoning, adding a little more salt and pepper to taste. Tip into a serving dish, scatter over the halloumi and sprinkle on the sliced chilli and coriander.

Basmati Facts

- ▶ Basmati is a super grain - gluten free and low in fat.
- ▶ It contains all eight essential Amino acids.
- ▶ A healthy source of folic acid.
- ▶ A ¾ cup serving of Basmati rice provides about 3g of protein.
- ▶ It is low in sodium and has no cholesterol.
- ▶ Basmati is a source of iron, manganese and B-vitamins such as niacin and thiamin.
- ▶ In ayurvedic cooking, white basmati rice is considered sattvic (pure) and balances the three doshas: pitta, vata, and kapha.
- ▶ In Hindi, Basmati means 'the queen of fragrances', in Arabic, 'my smile'.

