

# Rice Pilau

**Season:** Spring/Summer/Autumn

**Serves:** 30 tastes in the classroom  
or 6 at home

**Fresh from the garden:** dill, garlic, mint, onions, parsley, pomegranate, tomatoes

A fluffy rice pilau (or pilaf), with every grain of rice coated in the flavours of herbs, is at the heart of many Middle Eastern meals. This method ensures that each grain of rice is cooked perfectly until it is separate and dry, not sticky. The golden crust at the bottom of the pot is a particular treat. Fruit and meat, or cheese as here, are scattered on top but the rice is the ingredient that is celebrated.

This is an excellent recipe for students to practise rock-chopping fresh herbs, as there are so many herbs to be washed, dried and chopped finely. The pomegranate garnish adds a dash of sourness that is beautiful with the sweet apricot, onion and herby rice.

## Equipment:

sieve  
3 medium bowls  
1 small bowl  
chopping board  
large knife  
medium heavy-bottomed  
saucepan, with a lid  
tea towel  
measuring cups and spoons  
wooden spoon  
ridged grill pan (if using haloumi)

## Ingredients:

1½ cups basmati rice  
6–8 dried apricots  
olive oil  
20 g butter  
2 onions, chopped finely  
1 garlic clove, chopped finely  
2 or 3 fresh tomatoes  
1 big handful of fresh dill, chopped finely  
1 big handful of fresh flat-leaved parsley,  
chopped finely  
1 big handful of fresh mint, chopped finely  
salt and pepper  
600 mL chicken or vegetable stock  
200 g of feta or haloumi cheese, to serve  
1 fresh pomegranate, to serve



## What to do:

1. Put the rice in the sieve and rinse under running water. Fill a medium bowl with cold water, tip in the rice and let it soak while you prepare the vegetables and get ready to cook. (The rice can soak in water for up to 1 hour.)
2. In the small bowl, put the dried apricots in hot water and set aside to soak.
3. Peel the tomatoes and cut them in half. Chop the halves into small pieces.
4. Prepare the chopped herbs and onions as in the Ingredients list, and set them separately nearby in two medium bowls.
5. Remove the apricots from the hot water and chop them into tiny pieces.
6. Put the saucepan on medium heat and add a splash of olive oil. Add the butter.

7. When the butter melts and foams, add the onions and cook until it is beginning to soften, 2–3 minutes.
8. Add the garlic, apricots and tomatoes.
9. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are translucent and the apricots and tomatoes have softened.
10. Drain the rice into the sieve.
11. Tip the drained rice into the saucepan and add half the herbs – save the rest for later.
12. Season with salt and pepper.
13. Add the stock and bring it to the boil, uncovered. Do not stir! Let it boil hard for a few minutes until the surface of the rice is pitted (you should see holes appearing and the water level will seem to have dropped just below the top of the rice).
14. While you are waiting, take a fresh clean tea towel and wrap it completely around the saucepan lid so that the underside of the lid is covered. Tie the ends securely on top.
15. When the rice is pitted, jam on the lid with its tea towel wrapper. The tea towel will absorb the steam and make your rice fluffier.
16. Turn the heat down to the lowest setting and cook for 20–25 minutes.
17. Cut the pomegranate in half and, holding the cut side over a medium bowl, give it a good thwack with a wooden spoon. The seeds should fall out into the bowl.
18. Just before the rice is done, chop the feta or grill slices of haloumi in a ridged grill pan for a couple of minutes until they get chargrilled lines.
19. When the rice is done, fluff it with a fork, scraping up any golden crust on the bottom of the pan. Stir in the remaining fresh herbs, add a dash of extra virgin olive oil and check the seasoning.
20. Serve the pilau on platters. Place the cubes of feta or grilled haloumi around the sides and scatter pomegranate seeds on top.

