

SPICED GRAPE MOLASSES RICE PUDDING, an Old Armenian Recipe ZERDE, PRINTSOV KAGHTSERABOUR

1 cup short-grain white rice, washed, drained
5 cups water, plus 1 tablespoon, plus 2 1/2 cups, plus another 1/2 cup
pinch of salt
2 sticks cinnamon bark
3/4 cups granulated sugar, plus another 1/2-to-2/3 cups
1 tablespoon orange-blossom honey
3 tablespoons grape molasses, not syrup
1/3-to-1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/3 teaspoon ginger
1/4 teaspoon allspice
1/8 teaspoon cardamom
pinch of nutmeg
dash of cloves and black pepper
lightly toasted walnuts, medium-coarse chopped, optional

In a heavy-bottomed pot, combine rice, 5 cups water, salt and cinnamon bark and bring to a gentle boil. Reduce heat to low and cook covered 30-to-40 minutes until rice is tender and most liquid is absorbed. Remove cinnamon bark.

In a small heavy-bottomed stainless steel saucepan add 3/4 cups sugar and 1 tablespoon water and mix to combine. Cook over medium heat, without stirring, until sugar starts to caramelize and turn into an amber color. Quickly remove from heat and carefully add 2 1/2 cups water. Allow a few minutes for the sugar to soften then start stirring to combine. Add honey, grape molasses and remaining sugar and heat slightly until all ingredients are fully incorporated. Add spices and mix to combine.

Add the caramelized spiced-up syrup to the cooked rice. Bring to a boil, cover and simmer on low heat for 20-to-30 minutes until thickened; stirring once or twice. Uncover, add additional sugar and spices if desired and cook for another 8-to-10 minutes. Add the remaining 1/2 cup water and walnuts if using at the end. You should have a medium-thick porridge consistency pudding.

Allow rice pudding to cool 10 minutes in pan before ladling into individual bowls or a shallow serving platter. Refrigerate until set. Garnish as desired; typically, whole lightly toasted walnuts are gently pressed into the pudding as it just begins to set.

Makes 12 half-cup servings.