

ANOUSHABOUR // ARMENIAN NEW YEAR & CHRISTMAS PORRIDGE with Wheat Berries, Dried Fruit & Nuts

9 cups water, plus an additional 1-to-5 cups hot water as needed
2-to-3 teaspoons aniseed or 1-to-2 whole star anise
1/2-to-1 teaspoon fennel seeds
3/4 cups hulled durum wheat berries
2 tablespoons short-grain white rice, optional
brandy, optional
2-to-3 1/2 cups dried fruit (sultanas, apricot, pineapple, white peach, pears, figs)
3/4-to-1 3/4 cups granulated white sugar
1 1/2-to-2 1/2 cups assorted nuts, blanched, peeled (pistachios, almonds, pine nuts)
2/3 cups cooked chickpeas, optional
2/3 cups cooked white kidney beans, optional
3-to-4 tablespoons rose water

for garnish:

blanched almonds, toasted walnuts, crushed hazelnut
ground cinnamon
thinly sliced dried fruit, pomegranate arils

Bring 9 cups of water, aniseed/star anise and fennel seed to a boil; reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes. Add wheat berries and cook on medium-low heat, uncovered, until all just comes to a boil. Turn off heat, add rice as a thickening agent if using and set aside for 6-to-8 hours.

*** At this point, if desired, you can drench dried fruit with a little brandy and set aside for 6-to-8 hours. Make sure you select lightly colored dried fruit, not fresh. If you would like to use cranberries, raisins, cherries or vibrant hued fruit, drench in brandy in a separate bowl for a few hours then add some water, bring to a boil and simmer on low heat for 10-to-20 minutes until softened. Once cooked, drain fruit completely from liquid and only add to porridge when both are cold, to prevent colors from bleeding onto one another.

Bring pot back to a gentle boil once more and simmer on low heat for 1-to-1 1/2 hours; stirring occasionally. Cook to your likeness: 45 minutes to 1 hour if you like your grains to have a bite, 1 1/2 hours if you like it soft, and 2 hours if you like your porridge soupy/mushy.

Add more hot water as needed to reach your desired consistency. Add sugar and stir to dissolve completely; keep in mind that porridge will become sweeter once fruit is added.

Add drained fruit and cook on low for 12 minutes. Add nuts and cook for another 5 minutes. Add chickpeas and kidney beans if using. Add more water and sugar as needed this will not thicken considerably as it sets; what you see is what you get. Cook for another 5 minutes then turn off heat. Add rosewater.

*** Another flavoring option would be to omit adding aniseed and fennel or using rosewater, and instead, at the end, add about 1 teaspoon vanilla and about 1 teaspoon total of equal amounts of: nutmeg, cloves, ginger, cardamom and allspice.

Cool porridge in pot until almost room temperature, give it a gentle stir and pour into individual bowls or a serving platter. Chill until set. Garnish as desired.