Ingredient Guide

Everything you need to know about saffron

11 March 2024



The vibrant spice worth more than its weight in gold.

What is saffron?

Known as the ‘golden spice’, saffron is one of the most delicate and expensive spices in the world. From its subtle flavour to its distinctive fragrance and unmistakable red stigma, saffron has centuries-worth of history behind it. Valued for both its culinary and medicinal uses, a whole lot of work goes into creating this flavour booster – but, lucky for everyone, you don’t need much of it to make an impact in your dishes.

Why is saffron so expensive?

Painstakingly harvested by hand from Crocus Sativus, each bloom only produces three threads per year. That means thousands upon thousands of flowers need to be grown to yield just a kilogramme’s worth per year. Combined with a slow, delicate and labour-intensive process, the overall price reflects the effort it takes to get from seed to shelf.

What does saffron taste like?

Best described as a subtle flavour, you want to err on the side of caution when using it (and not only from a cost perspective). With a musty, earthy flavour and floral notes, add too much and you may end up making your food bitter.

A history of saffron

With a cultivation that spans more than 4,000 years, this spice has seen lots of use in ancient Greece, ancient Egypt and ancient Persia before spreading to eastern India, China, Spain, France, Italy and eventually throughout the world. Prized for its aromatic properties, its spiritual symbolism, its beautiful golden dye and its flavour, saffron has long been a symbol of elegance and wealth. Today, as a product that's not quite as unaffordable to the masses, it's widely used to create a number of dishes, both sweet and savoury.

What is saffron rice?

Simple, vibrant and utterly delicious, saffron rice has a number of variations across South Asia and the Middle East. Also known as 'yellow rice' for its golden hue, you only need a few ingredients to add this flavourful side dish to your mid-week meals. Made up of white rice, saffron threads, water and salt – plus some butter or oil for a little bit

of richness – that's really all it takes.

Where does saffron rice originate?

Seen across the Middle East, particularly Persian cuisine, and Asia, including Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, saffron rice has its own regional differences depending on where it's enjoyed. Whether you're making the perfectly crispy Tachin, serving it simply on the side of grilled meats and vegetables, or combining it with fragrant spices and nuts, like cardamom, pistachios and cinnamon, it's a celebration of flavour.

How much saffron is needed for saffron rice?

When we say 'a little goes a long way', we mean it. How much you need for your dish depends on how many servings you're making and how you're using it. Roughly two to

three threads per serving, saffron is best ground up and left to bloom in hot water for around 5-10 minutes before adding in. Or, if measuring isn't your bag, a very small pinch and a slightly bigger pinch.

What rice grain should I use for saffron rice?

A good quality white rice, like our Tilda Pure Basmati, is best for making saffron rice. Although you can use any type of rice for your dish, neither the flavour or texture will be quite the same. Plus, the distinctive taste of saffron really pairs with the beautiful fluffiness and aroma of good quality Basmati.

What should you serve with saffron rice?

A magnificent dish with many easy pairings, saffron rice easily lends itself best to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean flavours. Delightful on the side of flavoursome meats, stirred through with sweet and sour fruits, peppered with crunchy almonds and pistachios, or served as puddings, here's a few ideas to get you started:

Saffron Recipes

Pure Basmati Rice 500g

Persian Rice Cake with Barberries

This Persian dish is beautiful to look at and will be sure to impress your guests.

Pure Basmati Rice 500g

Zereshk Polo

A mouth-watering Zereshk Polo with Persian Saffron Chicken, using fragrant saffron rice, topped with sweet and sour barberries and crunchy pistachios.

Pure Basmati Rice 500g

Kheer brûlée

Experience pure indulgence with our irresistibly creamy kheer brûlée. This delectable dessert has a crackly, caramelized sugar layer that adds a tantalizing crunch to every spoonful. Expertly crafted using the finest Tilda Pure Basmati rice.

Brown Basmati and Wild Rice

Spiced Cauliflower, Roast Pear & Basmati & Wild Salad

This colourful rice salad recipe combines a plethora of tasty ingredients which all come together in perfect harmony.

Grand Extra Long Basmati Rice

Saffron Rice & Chicken

Savor the exquisite blend of tender chicken and aromatic saffron-infused rice in our delightful Saffron Rice & Chicken dish. Perfectly seasoned and expertly prepared, this flavorful combination promises to elevate your dining experience to new heights

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