

*Tender chunks of gently spiced beef in a fluffy saffron rice – this is a celebratory dish, a party on a plate, and a great way of feeding lots of people. Biryani originated Persia, not India, and started as a simple meal of rice and meat baked in the oven. Later, a biryani became a more complex dish with lots of richly aromatic ingredients. Serves 6*

## EXTRA-SPECIAL BEEF BIRYANI

100ml full-fat milk  
1 heaped tsp saffron threads  
1kg braising steak, cut into  
bite-sized chunks  
about 135ml sunflower oil  
4 onions  
4 garlic cloves  
25g chunk of fresh root  
ginger, peeled and roughly  
chopped  
2 fresh red chillies, deseeded  
and roughly chopped  
500ml cold water  
5 cloves  
2 tsp cumin seeds  
2 tsp coriander seeds  
¼ piece of cinnamon stick  
2½ tsp sea salt flakes,  
plus extra to season  
12 cardamom pods  
½ whole nutmeg,  
finely grated  
200ml natural yoghurt  
2 bay leaves  
2 tsp caster sugar  
325g basmati rice  
50g butter  
freshly ground black pepper

Pour the milk into a small saucepan, add the saffron threads and heat gently for 2 minutes without boiling. Remove from the heat and set aside for 2–3 hours, preferably overnight.

Trim the beef of any hard fat and cut it into bite-sized pieces. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a frying pan. Season the beef with salt and freshly ground black pepper and fry it in 2–3 batches over a medium-high heat until browned on all sides, adding more oil to the pan if necessary. Transfer the beef to a large saucepan that has a lid.

While the beef is frying, roughly chop 2 of the onions and put them in a food processor with the garlic, ginger and chillies. Add 50ml of the cold water and blend to a smooth paste.

Put the cloves, cumin, coriander, cinnamon, 1½ teaspoons of salt and seeds from the cardamom pods into a pestle and mortar. Grind until you have a fine powder. Grate the nutmeg into the spice mixture, then tip it all into the onion paste. Add plenty of freshly ground black pepper. Mix until all the ingredients are combined.

Add another 3 tablespoons of oil into the same frying pan that was used to cook the beef and fry the spiced onion paste over a medium heat for about 10 minutes until lightly browned, stirring often. Place the mixture into the pan with the beef. Stir in the yoghurt, the rest of the water and the bay leaves. Place the pan over a low heat and bring to a gentle simmer. Cover with a lid and simmer gently for 1½ hours or until the beef is tender, stirring occasionally.

Remove the lid from the pan and stir in the sugar. Increase the heat and simmer the sauce for 10 minutes, or until reduced and thick. Add a little more salt and pepper to taste.

Put the almonds for the garnish into a non-stick frying pan and toast them over a medium heat for 4–6 minutes. Stir the sultanas into the almonds, then tip them all into a heatproof bowl. Set aside to cool.

Cut the remaining 2 onions in half and slice them thinly. Pour 2 tablespoons of oil into a frying pan and fry the onions for 6–8 minutes over a fairly high heat until softened and golden-brown, stirring frequently. Set aside.

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Fan 160°C/Gas 4. Half-fill a large pan with water, add a teaspoon of salt and bring to the boil. Put the rice in a sieve and rinse under plenty of cold water. Stir the rice into the hot water and return to the boil. Cook for 5 minutes and drain well. Add the coriander and stir until well combined.

Transfer half the meat and sauce into a large ovenproof dish. Spoon over half of the part-cooked rice and drizzle with half the soaked saffron threads and milk. Top with half the fried onions. Repeat the layers once more. Dot with the butter. Cover the dish with 2 layers of tightly fitting foil and bake for 30 minutes.

To finish the garnish, hard boil the eggs for 9 minutes until firm and drain them in a sieve under running water until cool enough to handle. Peel the eggs and cut them into quarters. Remove the dish from the oven and discard the foil. Use a fork to lightly fluff the rice. Garnish with the freshly boiled eggs, then scatter with toasted almonds and sultanas. Add some chopped coriander and serve.

#### TOP TIP

*If you like a bit more heat in your curry, don't worry about deseeding both the chillies.*

#### Garnish

40g flaked almonds

50g sultanas

3 large eggs

fresh coriander leaves

4 tbsp chopped fresh coriander

