

## Lamb and Eggplant Pilaf

**Time:** about an hour

Pilaf, pilau, perloo, purlow are all Carolina lowcountry names for rice casseroles with Persian antecedents. During our colonial era, and well before cotton dominated the culture, Charleston exported fine wool to Europe and enjoyed the fall season with diverse mutton foods, now largely extinct from our table. The fall charcuterie traditions of mutton ham and stew are gone, but with the reintroduction of Carolina Rice, we *do* have a companion effort to repatriate heritage sheep in the Carolinas. Mutton pilaf was the first new crop rice dish of the fall entertainment season on plantations around Charleston. To celebrate this dish, we've chosen not to direct you to heritage breed mutton from our very small producers here—they've sold out anyway. Instead, our new crop Carolina Gold rice pilaf marries the finest fall eggplant and the last of our heirloom tomatoes with something you can easily find: fresh ground lamb.

Bold and satisfying, this dish announces all things autumnal: spice notes, mysterious seasonings, mild lamb, fragrant ripe tomatoes and the sweet richness of roasted eggplant. It is an Eastern costume of flavors cloaked in a perceptible dark richness that whispers, "Persia."

## Equipment Mise en Place

For the lamb stock you will need a small roasting pan, a pair of tongs, a heavy-bottomed 5- to 6-quart stockpot, a fine conical sieve or china cap, and a medium saucepan. For the pilaf you will need a large shallow glass baking dish or a rimmed sheet pan lined with parchment, a large, well-seasoned cast iron skillet and pot lid that will fit into the skillet; and a 6- to 8-quart Dutch oven.

## Working Ahead

Plan to make the lamb stock a day or two before the pilaf. Lift the congealed fat off the top once it has become cold and firm.

## Ingredients

*for the lamb stock:*

Vegetable spray

1 lamb shank (about 1 pound)

## Cooking Notes

A glance down this recipe may lead you to think it is awfully involved. But it is actually more like a sequence of baby steps that results in an impressively choreographed dish. We do recommend that you make a lamb stock, but you could, of course, demure and go with a carton of chicken broth.

# Anson Mills

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2 medium yellow onions, unpeeled and chopped

2 small carrots, chopped

1 large celery rib, chopped

6 garlic cloves, smashed

2 tablespoons tomato paste

2 cups decent dry red wine

1 ½ quarts spring or filtered water

6 sprigs fresh thyme or 2 teaspoons dried thyme

1 Turkish bay leaf

Handful of flat-leaf parsley stems

2 teaspoons whole black peppercorns

1 whole clove

*for the pilaf:*

2 small, slender, firm and glossy eggplant, about 20 ounces pre-trimmed weight

Fine sea salt

¼ cup good olive oil

1 pound fresh, ripe tomatoes or 1 14 ½ ounce can whole peeled tomatoes in juice

1 pound fresh ground lamb

1 large yellow onion, minced

1 cup (7 ounces) Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice, rinsed and drained well

2 cups simmering lamb stock, above

1 ½ teaspoons fine sea salt

½ teaspoon ground allspice

¼ teaspoon ground cardamom

Scant ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

¾ teaspoon ground turmeric

½ teaspoon crushed red pepper

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Handful of fresh, chopped flat-leaf parsley

Yogurt for garnish

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## Directions

1. *Make the stock:* Adjust a rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 425 degrees. Spray a small roasting pan with oil and add the lamb shank. Roast the shank, turning it occasionally with tongs, until it is well browned, about an hour. Add the onions, carrots, celery, garlic, and tomato paste and continue to roast, stirring once or twice, until the vegetables have colored, 30 to 45 minutes more. Transfer the contents of the roasting pan to a heavy-bottomed 5-to 6-quart stockpot and set the roasting pan on a burner over high heat. Add the wine and deglaze the pan, stirring with a wooden spoon to scrape up the brown bits. Transfer the deglazing liquid into the pot with the shank and vegetables. Add the thyme, bay, parsley stems, peppercorns, clove and the water. Bring to a simmer over high heat, reduce the heat to low and simmer slowly until stock is rich and flavorful, about 3 hours. Remove from the heat, and strain through a fine conical sieve or china cap into a deep bowl (there should be about 4 cups of stock). Transfer the bowl to the refrigerator and cool.

2. *Prepare the eggplant:* Trim the ends from the eggplants and slice them into quarter-inch slices. Sprinkle fine sea salt over the bottom of a large shallow glass baking dish or a rimmed sheet pan lined with parchment. Arrange the eggplant slices in the dish or pan; sprinkle the tops with salt. Allow the eggplant slices to stand until they release a fair amount of liquid, about 30 minutes. Dry them on paper towels without rinsing and set them aside. Wash and dry the glass baking dish or sheet pan. Line the sheet pan if using with a fresh parchment sheet.

3. *While the eggplant slices are being salted, prepare the tomatoes:* Core the tomatoes and peel them with a sharp paring knife or peeler. Cut them in half lengthwise, and then into quarters. Use your fingers to coax the seeds out from the walls of the tomato wedges. Discard the seeds. Cut each quarter into 3 pieces and set the tomatoes aside (you should have 2 cups). If you are using canned tomatoes, drain them and use your fingers to remove the seeds. Cut the tomatoes into fairly large pieces and set them aside.

4. Heat a large, well-seasoned cast iron skillet over medium-high heat. Pour the olive oil into a small bowl. Dip each eggplant slice quickly into the oil and run the slice through your fingers to skim excess oil off the eggplant and back into the bowl. Place them back into the clean baking dish or on sheet pan. When all the slices have been oiled and the skillet is hot, arrange half the eggplant in the skillet. Lower a large pot lid that fits into the skillet over the slices to weigh them down and sear, without turning, about 40 seconds. (Lift the lid and peek under the slices to get a sense of how they're browning—when they're just right they will be spotty brown and soft. Turn the slices with tongs and sear them on the other side, using the pot lid for weight and even browning. Transfer the seared eggplant back to the baking dish or sheet pan

and cook the remaining slices. When the eggplant is cool enough to handle, stack the sliced on top of each other and cut them into quarters. Set aside.

5. *Reduce the lamb stock:* Remove the congealed fat from the chilled lamb stock with a spoon or skimmer and discard. Pour the stock into a heavy-bottomed 3-quart saucepan and reduce it over high heat until you have just over 2 cups. Remove the stock from the heat and return to a simmer just before adding it to the pilaf ingredients.

6. *Make the pilaf:* Combine the allspice, cardamom, cinnamon, turmeric, red and black pepper in a small bowl and stir to combine. Separate the lamb into 1-inch bits and place it in a 6- to 8-quart Dutch oven over medium heat. Brown the lamb slowly, turning the pieces only when the bottoms are well browned, 5 to 7 minutes in all. Sprinkle the lamb with salt and half the spice mixture after the bottom pieces brown. When the lamb is done, transfer it to a bowl with a slotted spoon. Pour or spoon all but 2 tablespoons of fat from the Dutch oven and discard. Add the onions to the leftover fat, sprinkle them with salt and the remaining spice mixture, and cook them over medium heat until they are soft and brown, stirring frequently, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir the rice into the onions and sauté it, stirring constantly, until the rice is opaque and separated into individual kernels, 2 minutes. Add the browned lamb, the tomatoes, eggplant, 2 cups of simmering stock and an additional half teaspoon of salt. Stir to combine the ingredients. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, then reduce the heat to the low. Cover the Dutch oven and cook the dish for 20 minutes. After 20 minutes check to see if the rice has swollen and most of the liquid has evaporated from the pilaf. If that is the case, remove the pot from the heat and allow the pilaf to rest, covered, for five minutes. If the rice is still firm and the dish wet, continue to cook it covered 10 minutes more, then allow it to rest for 5 minutes. Stir in the chopped parsley and taste for seasoning. Serve very hot with a big spoonful of yogurt on each portion.

**Serves 6 to 8**