

Rice Pudding With Chai Spices and Saffron Apricots

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup arborio rice	5 cups whole milk
$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon saffron threads	1 cinnamon stick
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried apricots	5 whole cloves
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar	$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cardamom
1 tablespoon brandy	seeds.

1. The day before serving, soak the rice in water overnight and preheat the oven to 300 degrees. In a small heatproof dish, dry the saffron in the oven for 2 minutes. Tip the saffron onto a square of wax paper and crush into a powder with the back of a spoon. Place apricots in a small heatproof bowl. In a small saucepan, bring $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, 1 tablespoon of the sugar and the saffron to a boil. Lower the heat to a gentle simmer and stir to dissolve the sugar. Remove from heat, stir in the brandy and pour the liquid over the apricots. Cover the bowl and let sit at room temperature overnight.
2. The next day, drain the rice. Combine the milk, cinnamon stick, cloves, cardamom and remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar in a 3-quart saucepan. Scald the milk over medium heat, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Remove from the heat when the bubbles begin to collect around the edge and let steep for 15 minutes. Strain, return to the pan and keep warm over low heat.
3. Heat the rice in a medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium-high heat. Add about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the warm milk, stirring constantly until the rice has absorbed most of the liquid. Continue adding milk by the ladleful and stirring, until the rice is tender to the bite, 15 to 20 minutes. On the last addition of milk, leave most of the milk unabsorbed. (The mixture should be very soupy; you may not need all of the milk.)
4. Pour the pudding into a 1-quart baking dish. Lay a sheet of plastic wrap directly over the rice pudding. Chill for at least 2 hours.
5. Before serving, let the pudding sit at room temperature for 5 to 10 minutes. Meanwhile, using a slotted spoon, transfer the apricots to a cutting board and roughly chop. Stir them back into the bowl with their juices. To serve, mix the pudding and portion into 4 small bowls. Top with the saffron apricots and juices. *Serves 4.*