

(Raphil's) Rice Pudding

When *Jewish Cooking in America* was first published, my husband could not understand why I did not include rice pudding. I was waiting for Barbara Seldin's recipe from her father's deli in Miami Beach, once located on 41st Street and Arthur Godfrey Road. Here it is. To recreate the mood of Raphil's, where this classic was a fixture, Barbara and her cookbook-writer husband Steve Raichlen set the scene for me. "It is Miami Beach, 1949. Harry Truman is president. The musical *South Pacific* opens on Broadway. Miami Beach is America's favorite winter vacation spot and Raphil's is its premier deli. Founded by Ray Malshik and Phil Seldin, Raphil's plays to standing-room-only crowds during the season. No celebrity—from Frank Sinatra to Sammy Davis Jr.—passes through town without an obligatory sandwich at Raphil's. Company trucks criss-cross the Beach, delivering deli platters to the cream of society. Miami Beach is enjoying its Golden Era and Raphil's is the place to be." Since Raphil's is no longer, we tasted the pudding, sprinkled with toasted Indian nuts, today called pine nuts, in Barbara and Steve's kitchen in Coconut Grove.

*1 cup Valencia-style or arborio
(short-grain) rice*

*1 cinnamon stick (2 inches
long)*

3 strips lemon zest

1 vanilla bean, split

*1 can (12 ounces) evaporated
milk*

1. To wash the rice, put it in a large heavy saucepan with cold water to cover by 2 inches. Swirl it around with a spoon; the water will become cloudy. Pour the water off and add more. Continue rinsing the rice this way until the water runs clear. Drain off the water, leaving the rice in the pan.

2. Add 2½ cups of fresh water, the cinnamon stick, lemon zest, and vanilla bean, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat, cover, and gently simmer the rice until most of the water is absorbed, about 20 minutes.

*1 can (14 ounces) sweetened
condensed milk*

*1 whole star-anise pod
(optional)*

*1/2 cup raisins, soaked in warm
water to cover*

*1 to 2 tablespoons sugar, or to
taste*

1/2 cup pine nuts, lightly toasted

*Ground cinnamon or freshly
grated nutmeg, for
sprinkling*

3. Stir in the evaporated milk. Gently simmer, uncovered, until most of the liquid is absorbed, about 8 minutes. Stir the rice occasionally.

4. Stir in the sweetened condensed milk, and, if using, the star anise and the raisins. Gently simmer, uncovered, until most of the liquid is absorbed and the rice is very tender, about 6 minutes. The pudding should remain very moist. Stir occasionally.

5. Remove the cinnamon stick, lemon zest, vanilla bean, and star-anise pod. Stir in the sugar, to taste. Transfer to a bowl and let the rice pudding cool to room temperature. You can serve it at room temperature or chilled.

6. To serve, transfer the rice pudding to a serving bowl or individual bowls. Sprinkle with the toasted pine nuts and a little ground cinnamon or nutmeg and serve at once.

Yield: 8 servings (D)