

Fragrant Rice Flour and Milk Pudding ***sutlach***

Called *sutlach* by the Sephardic communities of Turkey and Greece, this is a light but nourishing rice pudding. Traditionally it is served on Friday night, after Saturday Sabbath morning services, as part of the meal breaking the fast on Yom Kippur, or for the Jewish festival of Shavuot. My mother would make individual bowls of *sutlach* and sprinkle my sister's and my initials on the top with ground cinnamon, a practice my children and grandchildren also love.

In this recipe from Rhodes, ground rice flour is used, which gives the dessert a gloriously creamy texture. It is infused with rose water and sprinkled with ground cinnamon. Though easy to make, this pudding requires a little patience as it takes about 15 minutes of constant stirring over very low heat to thicken. There is a quicker alternative using cornflour, which I describe below. I prefer *sutlach* chilled alongside fresh berries.

4 heaped tbsp ground rice flour
½ cup water
4 cups (850ml/1½pt) whole milk
3 tbsp caster (superfine) sugar, or to taste
1 tbsp rose water or vanilla extract

For the topping:

ground cinnamon

You will need:

4 small, shallow heatproof bowls or 6 ramekins

Blend the rice flour and water in a small bowl and stir until smooth.

Combine the milk and sugar in a large, deep, heavy-based pan and set over a medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, stirring frequently using a balloon whisk. When the milk comes to a boil remove from the heat. Stir the rice flour mixture into the milk. Return the pan to the heat, stirring continuously for 2 minutes, and then reduce to a medium heat. Continue stirring in the same direction for about 15 minutes or until the pudding thickens and coats the back of a spoon. Be sure to stir constantly and scrape the bottom and sides of the pan as this prevents the pudding from forming lumps and catching to the bottom of the pan. Remove from the heat and stir in the rose water or vanilla extract.

Strain the pudding into a jug and pour immediately into individual serving bowls or ramekins. Seal each bowl with plastic wrap to prevent a skin forming.

Serve at room temperature or chilled, sprinkled with ground cinnamon.

Twists on Tradition:

- You can use 3 tbsp cornflour (cornstarch) in place of the rice flour. This takes no more than about 5 minutes to cook.
- For a piney flavour crush 1 mastic crystal to a powder with 1 tsp caster sugar and stir in very quickly when the heat is turned off.

- Toppings: You can substitute the cinnamon with toasted blanched almonds, coarsely chopped pistachios or desiccated coconut, and a little grenadine syrup poured on the top for a splash of deep pink colour. Rose petal preserve, found at Greek or Middle Eastern stores, is heavenly swirled into the pudding.