DIRECT · MEDIUM

Uzbek Beef Plov in a Dutch Oven on the Kamado, Fluffy Rice and Golden Zirvak

Plov (?i>zl) is the festive rice of Central Asia. Here a dutch oven stands in for the kazan: a beef zirvak over a lively fire, then rice steamed with the vents almost closed and never stirred once.



PREP	COOK	SERVINGS	TEMPERATURE
30 min	150 min	6	150 °C

Ingredients

- **700 g** beef chuck (aguja de ternera) or shin (morcillo), in 3-4 cm cubes
- **600 g** carrots, cut into 5 mm sticks
- **150 ml** sunflower oil
- **1 cda** whole cumin seeds
- **15 g** fine salt, plus a pinch for soaking
- **1 cda** dried barberries (zereshk), optional
- **600 g** devzira rice or, as a substitute, basmati
- **300 g** onion, in half-moons
- **2 ud** whole heads of garlic, outer loose skin removed
- **1 cdta** whole coriander seeds
- **1 ud** whole dried chilli
- **1.8 l** hot water, approximately (about 600 ml for the zirvak, the rest for the rice)

Method

1 WASH AND SOAK THE RICE

Wash the rice in a bowl of cold water, rubbing it between your hands, and change the water until it runs almost clear, five or six times. Cover with lukewarm water, add a pinch of salt and leave to soak for an hour while you prepare everything else. Peel the carrots and cut them into 5 mm sticks: grated, they dissolve into the stew. Cut the meat into 3-4 cm cubes and pat it dry with kitchen paper.

2 LIGHT WITH NO DEFLECTOR

Fill the firebox with Jealous Devil quebracho charcoal, light it and set the grate in place with no deflector. Put the empty, uncovered dutch oven in the centre and bring the kamado to 200-230 °C with the bottom vent open about three fingers and the top vent at three-quarters. Allow 15-20 minutes with the chamber steady so the iron heats right through. Meanwhile crush the cumin and coriander in the H&H mortar, just enough to crack the seeds open.

3 BROWN THE BEEF

With the Grill Heat Aid gloves on, open by burping the lid: lift it about 5 cm, wait about 5 seconds, then open fully with your face turned away. Pour in the oil with the lid open and wait 1-2 minutes, just until it shimmers; if it starts to smoke, the pot is too hot: add the meat straight away. Lay the meat in a single layer and close the lid. After 5-6 minutes turn it over; in total, 10-12 minutes until well browned on several sides.

4 ONION AND CARROT

Every time you open up, burp the lid and wear the gloves. Add the onion on top of the meat, stir and close the lid for 6-8 minutes, until golden and soft. Spread the carrot over it in a layer, without mixing at first, and close for another 5 minutes. Then stir carefully and leave 5 minutes more: the carrot should soften and turn the oil orange, not toast. If the base starts to darken too much, close the bottom vent a little.

5 SIMMER THE ZIRVAK

Add the crushed cumin and coriander, the salt, the chilli and the barberries. Pour in hot water to cover the meat, about 600 ml, and sink the two heads of garlic. Leave the pot uncovered, close the kamado lid and shut the vents almost completely: the chamber will drift down towards about 150 °C as it simmers. Cook 45-60 minutes, until the meat is tender when pierced; at the half-hour mark top up with water if it shows through.

6 SPREAD THE RICE

Open by burping the lid (5 cm, about 5 seconds) with gloves on. Take out the heads of garlic. Taste the broth: it should be a little salty, as the rice will absorb some of it. Drain the rice and spread it over the zirvak without mixing. Pour hot water with a ladle onto a slotted spoon, so the layer is not disturbed, until it stands 1.5 cm above the rice. Close the kamado and leave the pot uncovered for 10-15 minutes, until no water shows on the surface.

7 STEAM, COVERED

Burping the lid and wearing gloves, gather the rice into a soft mound with the slotted spoon, without reaching the bottom, and sink the heads of garlic back in. Poke five or six holes down to the zirvak with the handle of a wooden spoon to let the steam out. Cover the pot, close the kamado with the vents almost shut, at about 150 °C, and leave 25-30 minutes without opening or stirring.

8 REST AND SERVE

Open by burping the lid (5 cm, about 5 seconds, face turned away) and check one grain from the surface: it should be tender and separate. Lift the pot out with the gloves and both hands, because the handles are at chamber temperature, and leave it covered for 10 minutes on a board. Close both vents fully to put out the coals. Gently mix the rice with the carrot and serve on a large platter with the meat and the heads of garlic on top.

Editor's tips

- The carrot goes in as sticks, never grated: in plov it is half the flavour and it has to reach the plate whole, sweet and soft but still holding its shape. Central Asian shops sometimes stock yellow carrots, which are the traditional ones and give a less sweet base.
- Count how many times you open the lid: each opening in the hot stage lets air in and the coals flare up. Open only to add ingredients, always burping the lid and wearing gloves, and if anything runs away from you, see the temperature problems guide.
- If you use shin (morcillo), stretch the zirvak towards the full hour or a little longer: it has more collagen than chuck and needs time to soften before the rice goes in, because afterwards you cannot check it without breaking the layer.
- The lightly toasted crust that sticks to the base, the kazmak, is part of the dish and is served separately for whoever wants it. If it smells burnt rather than toasted, close the vents sooner next time when the water goes in.

Gear for this recipe

Overmont Dutch Oven-L: 6.3 L, 29.7 cm cast-iron Dutch oven

Plov needs an iron pot that acts as the kazan: mass to brown the beef without the oil cooling, and a thick base so the rice steams without scorching. The Overmont Dutch Oven-L is uncoated cast iron with an iron lid, 6.3 L and 29.7 cm across. The listing rates it to 250 °C; the dome stays at 200-230 °C, but the base sits over direct coals: bare iron copes with that, and it is a reason not to go past 230 °C or stretch the empty preheat. According to its images it measures about 36 cm handle to handle, so it sits centred on a 44.5 cm grate. The real drawback: it is shallow, about 9 cm deep, and that is why the recipe stays at 600 g of rice.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/overmont-dutch-oven-hierro-fundido-6-3l

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Kamado Bono Media 51 cm

This recipe asks two things of the kamado: room for a pot about 36 cm handle to handle, and a ceramic shell that can go from 200-230 °C to a gentle fire around 150 °C without going out. The Kamado Bono Media has a grate of about 45 cm according to distributor listings (44.5 cm for the replacement grate), so the dutch oven sits centred with about 4.5 cm per side; in a kamado with a 33-34 cm grate it would not fit. Its standard deflectors are not used here: the pot works over the coals, the thick iron base spreads the heat and the liquid of the zirvak cushions the rice above it. And the ceramic mass sustains the second stage with the vents almost closed, which is exactly what the steam requires.

mikamado.es/en/kamados/kamado-bono-media-51

Jealous Devil 100% White Quebracho lump charcoal 15.8 kg

That is close to two and a half hours of lit kamado with no refuelling: an opening stage at 200-230 °C for browning and a long, low-air stage for the stew and the steam. Jealous Devil is quebracho blanco lump charcoal, a very dense wood, and the manufacturer describes it as low in ash with a long burn. Big lumps let air through when the vents are almost closed, which is when fine charcoal chokes in its own ash. With the firebox full at the start there is plenty for the whole recipe, and whatever has not burned goes out when you close the vents and can be reused next time.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/jealous-devil-quebracho-lump-charcoal

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H&H Mortaio: 18 cm white marble mortar with pestle

Cumin is the signature of plov, and whole seed gives up only half its flavour, while ground cumin from a jar fades in a long stew. What the zirvak wants is cumin and coriander only just cracked open, the grain still recognisable, so they perfume the pot for an hour without turning bitter. The 18 cm H&H marble mortar has enough weight and bowl for two or three strokes per spoonful without the seeds jumping out, and the stone does not hold on to the smell of cumin for the next spice. It is a one-minute job while the iron heats in the kamado.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/hh-mortero-marmol-blanco-18cm

Grill Heat Aid – Heat-Resistant Aramid/Kevlar BBQ Gloves

In this recipe the kamado lid is opened several times with a lively fire: for the oil, the meat, the onion, the carrot, the water and the rice. Every opening means burping the lid, with your hand near the rim and the iron at chamber temperature, handles included. The Grill Heat Aid gloves are aramid and cover hand and wrist for handling the dutch oven lid, adding ingredients next to the hot rim and, at the end, lifting out a pot carrying more than six kilos of iron plus the plov. A folded cloth will not last that long in contact with the handle.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/grill-heat-aid-guantes-bbq-resistentes-calor

Full recipe at: mikamado.es/en/recetas/plov-uzbeko-ternera-dutch-oven-kamado

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