

LEMON RICE PUDDING

There is nothing I can do here: you either love rice pudding or hate it; only you know which. Having said that, this is a rice pudding far removed from school-cafeteria hell: it's cool, skinless, infused with lemon and lightened with softly whipped cream. Decant it into individual glasses and eat almost like a lemon-rice fool, or serve out of one huge bowl. I like it pale, undecorated, unaccompanied, just as it is, though it certainly goes very well with blueberries, providing you can find ones that actually taste of blueberries. If you're going the individually portioned route, tumble a pile of berries into the glass first and dollop the rice on top.

Toward the end of summer, or when it's passed, when you might want to inject a little warmth into supper, serve alongside a dish of roast plums. Use any color you want, for taste, but those fiery red ones look ludicrously magnificent: just cut each plum in half, remove the pits, place the plums to sit snugly in a buttered ovenproof dish, sprinkle a little sugar in each cavity and blitz in a hot oven, around 400°F, for 20 minutes or so.

scant ½ cup medium-grain rice

zest of 2 lemons and juice of 1

1 quart plus 6 tablespoons whole milk

3 tablespoons granulated sugar

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy cream

few drops lemon oil

Put the rice, lemon zest and milk into a wide-bottomed saucepan and bring to the boil over medium heat. As soon as the milk's started bubbling, turn the heat right down and, if you've got one, put a heat diffuser underneath the pan; the more slowly you cook the rice, the more gloriously creamy it is. To stop the rice forming a skin—and I shudder even to mention the word—cover the milk directly with a piece of wax paper. I will try to explain how I do this: I cut out a large square—slightly bigger than the circumference of the pan—and then fold all four corners in, rather as if I were making a kite, not that I've ever done such a thing in my life. Then I sit this piece of paper on top of the milk and rice in the pan and fold the corners back out so that they stick to the interior of the pan, above the milk. Let the rice cook like this for about 40 minutes, or until the rice is cooked and most of the liquid absorbed (the milk will continue being absorbed as the rice cools). Take the rice off the heat and beat in the sugar, then leave to stand for 5 minutes or so before beating in the juice of the lemon; if the rice is too hot, it will curdle as you do this. If you want you can use a few drops of lemon oil in place of the juice here; at any rate, you will be needing it later.

Turn the rice pudding into a bowl and, performing your kite-folding trick again, cover with wax paper. Leave to cool, and then chill in the refrigerator. Once it's really cold, take it out of the refrigerator, remove its paper lid and then whip the cream with a few drops of lemon oil until thick but not clumping and stiff, and fold into the rice pudding.

Serves 8–10.