

Saffron: A Tale of Tradition, Trade, and Taste

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Exploring History, Principles, and Practices of
Persian Cookery and Food Of Iran

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Outline

- ❖ Fake and Adulterated Saffron
- ❖ Culinary Perspective of the Anatomy of Saffron
- ❖ Best Kitchen Practices for Dealing with Saffron
 - Grinding
 - Steeping
 - Storing
 - Cooking
- ❖ Most Popular Uses of Saffron in Persian Cookery

Fake and Adulterated Saffron



Fake saffron can be manufactured by dyeing:

Corn Silk



Horsehair



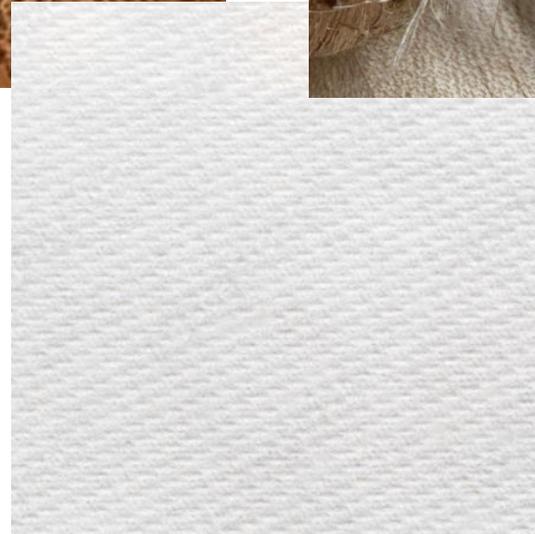
Saffron Roots



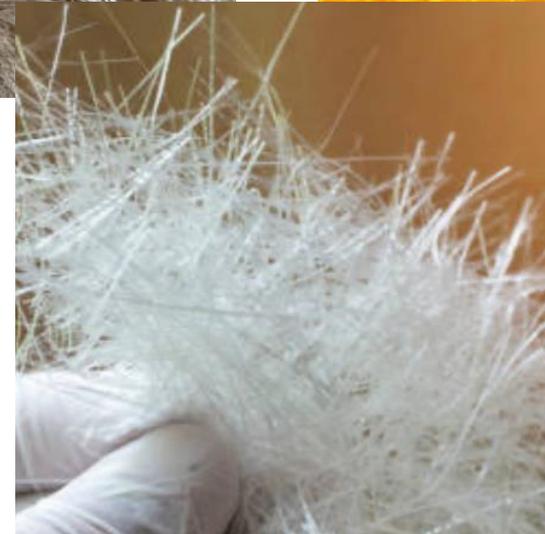
Safflower



Hay



Tissue Paper



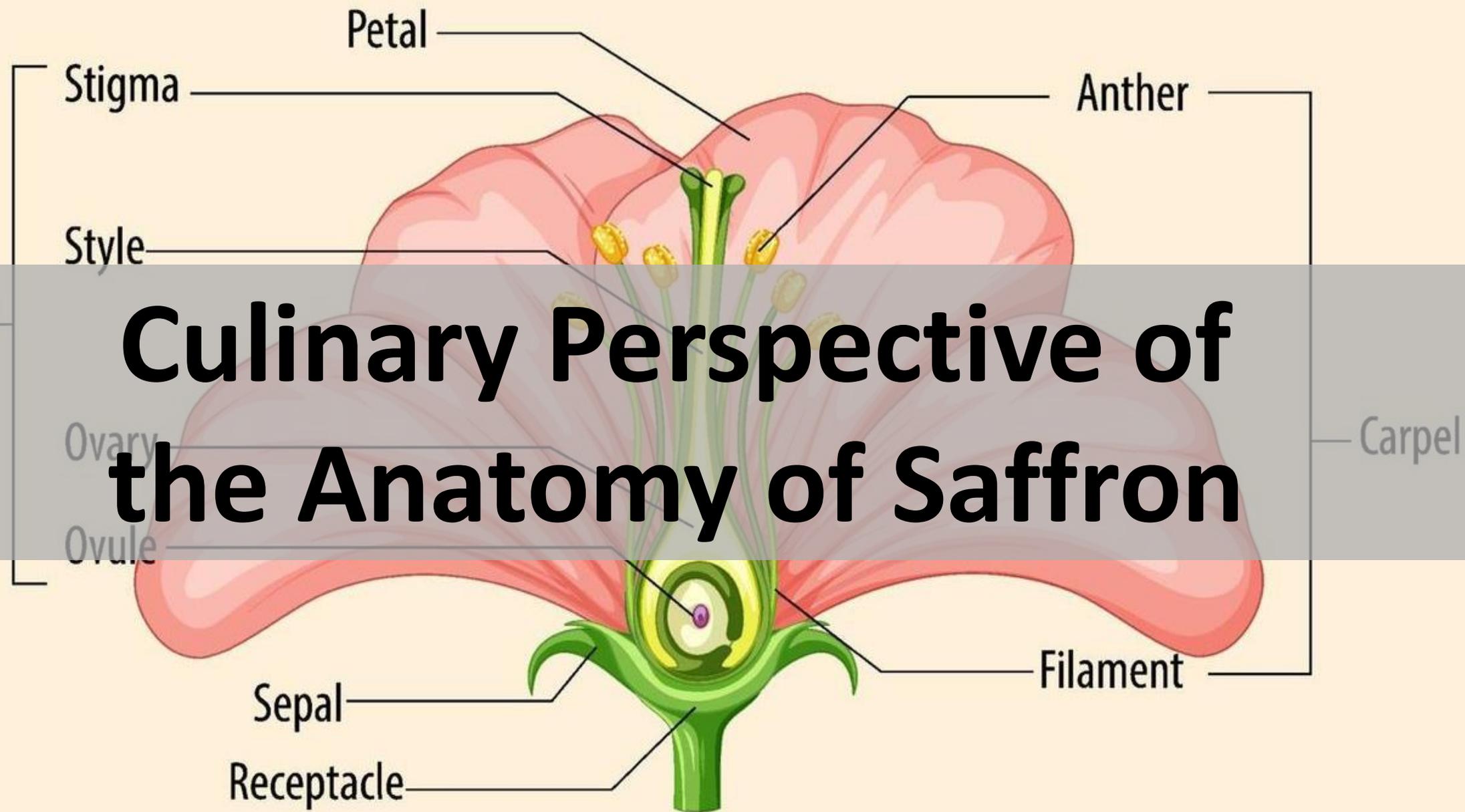
Plastic



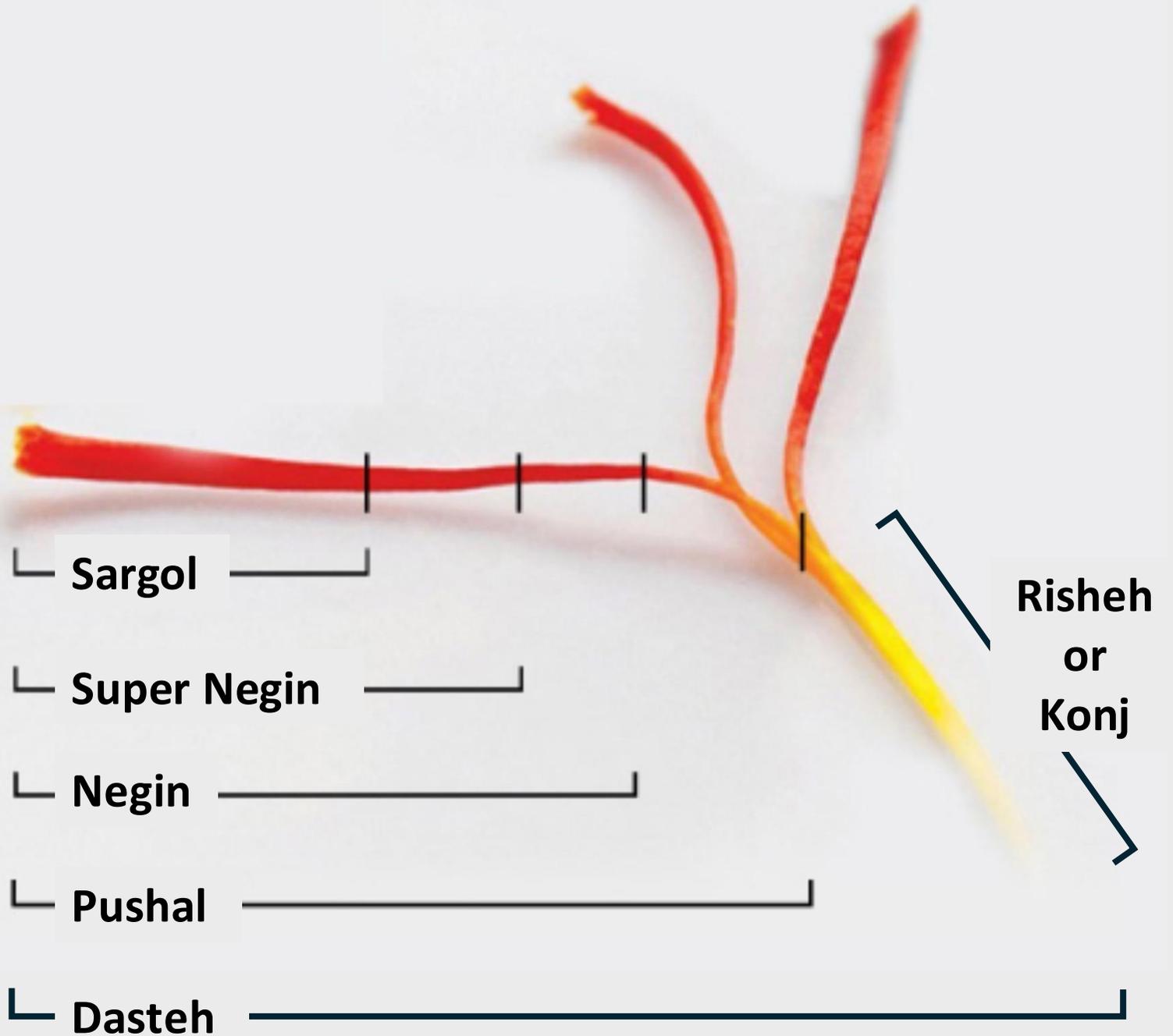
The color of the saffron comes from the body of the stigma, not just from its surface, and hence it releases slowly and stays suspended longer.

Fake and adulterated saffron start to release its color immediately because artificial color is often applied to the exterior of the fake threads.

Culinary Perspective of the Anatomy of Saffron



Primary Grades of Saffron



**Which parts
contribute
to the color
and/or
to the aroma?**

Aroma



Color

Could be as aromatic as the pure red parts.





Best Kitchen Practices for Dealing with Saffron

Most Important Things

❖ Grinding

❖ Steeping

❖ Storing

❖ Cooking with



Saffron Grinding Methods

Washability?

Untreated Wood
(not a good idea)



NO

YES

YES

MAYBE

Not all parts are fully washable. Okay if dedicated for saffron.

YES

YES

YES

YES

Size?

Too big

Might be too big

Might be too big



NO

MAYBE

YES

YES

YES

YES

YES

MAYBE

Additives to increase grinding friction ?

- ❖ Some home cooks add a bit of salt or sugar to improve the grinding process
- ❖ Advantages
 - Speeds up the grinding process in mortar and pestle
- ❖ Disadvantages
 - Adds flavor to the saffron
 - May need to keep two versions for savory vs. sweet dishes
- ❖ It is not necessary

An Interesting Alternative to Traditional Tools

❖ Method:

- Put saffron threads in a small fully sealable strong plastic bag
- Put the bag on a hard surface
- Rub with the back of a spoon

❖ Yes, it works

- A bit risky!





A Bit of Persian Saffron Steeping Nostalgia & Nomenclature



Traditional Steeping / Blooming of Ground Saffron

❖ Persian: دم کشیدن

➤ Romanized: Dam-keshidan

❖ There is no good English translation for this term.

➤ Culinarily speaking, it is something between integrating, steeping, steaming, and resting—all at the same time.

❖ Ancient Persian culinary concept for preparing:

➤ Liquid saffron

➤ Loose-leaf tea

➤ Persian twice-cooked steamed rice

➤ Certain Persian rice-based custards and puddings

Traditional Saffron Steeping Vessel

A small clear glass tea pot



Steaming Persian-Style Rice



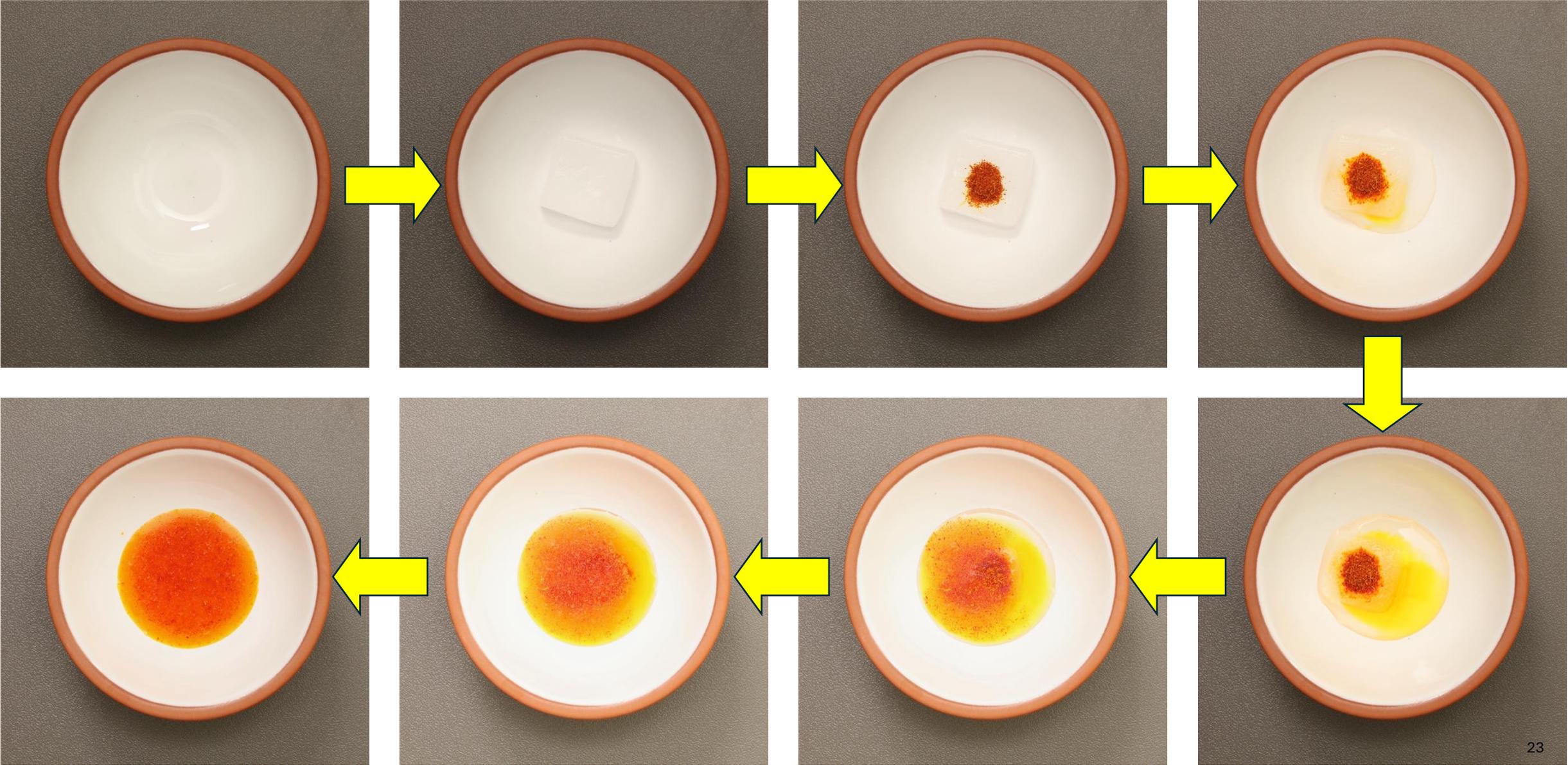
Steaming Rice ↔ Steeping Saffron



The background is a colorful collage of digital technology icons. At the top left, a hand holds a tablet with a red screen and a white play button. To its right, a hand holds a tablet with a yellow screen and a blue download icon, with a dotted line connecting it to a smartphone with a red screen and a white Wi-Fi icon. Below these, a hand holds a smartwatch with a red screen and a white speech bubble icon. In the bottom center, a hand is shown typing on a laptop keyboard. To the right of the laptop is a white coffee cup and a black mouse. The entire scene is set against a background of yellow, blue, and red geometric shapes.

Contemporary Alternative Saffron Steeping Method

Sprinkling Ground Saffron on Ice Cubes



Steeping in Hot Water vs. with Ice

	Steeping via Ice Cube	Steeping in 80°C Hot Water
Flavor	Develops slowly	Immediate release Slightly bolder flavor
Color	Starts with a lighter yellow Gradual deepening	Immediate vibrant yellow-orange
Aroma	Unfolds slowly Preserves some of the more subtle aromas	Releases quickly

Most home cooks cannot distinguish between the two after both have reached the room temperature.



A Home cook's Storing Strategy

Threads → Ground → Steeped

Storage (of threads, ground, or steeped)

❖ **Treat it like any other valuable spice:**

- Airtight container in a cool, dry, dark environment
- Away from sources of humidity, light, and heat

❖ **Do NOT store in refrigerator or freezer.**

❖ **Only grind what you may need to use within the next few weeks.**

❖ **Do not purchase in ground form.**

Recommended Storage Strategy



- Longer term storage
- Do not open more than once a month (cool, dry, dark)

- Grind what you may need for the next few weeks
- Store ground saffron powder in a small glass jar (cool, dry, dark)

- Steep what you may need for the next week
- Store unused steeped liquid saffron in a small glass jar in the refrigerator



Best Practices for Cooking with Saffron

Best Practices for Efficient & Effective Use of Saffron

❖ When during the cooking process to add saffron?

- The longer it cooks, the more it loses its aroma.
- Consider adding it towards the end of the cooking period.

❖ In a meat marinate?

- Do not add it to the marinating liquid.
- Salt the meat and then massage the meat with steeped saffron liquid; let sit for 30 min; only then pour the marinating liquid over the meat.

❖ Adding it for its color?

- Don't bother adding it to dishes with very dark color.
- For light color dishes that are to be cooked for an extended period of them (e.g., paella, puddings, custards), consider adding saffron in two stages. Initially to imbue its color into the ingredients and later to preserve its aroma

❖ Adding it to a syrup for its color and aroma?

- Add it after the syrup has been cooked and cooled down a bit



Most Popular Uses of Saffron in Persian Cookery – Savory & Sweet

Most Popular Uses of Saffron in Persian Cookery

Savory



Chelow
Steamed
White Rice

Tahdig



Tahchin

Most Popular Uses of Saffron in Persian Cookery

Sweet



Sholeh-Zard
Saffron Rice
Pudding



Baklava
Cake



Wide
Range of
Halvas



Zoolbia

Bamieh

