

Baklava

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Introduction

Baklava. Perhaps I should make no comments because words cannot really describe it. You have to taste it! If you are on tour around the Mediterranean (which you should also do) pay attention to the following:

- If you go to Greece, be sure to ask for “Μπακλαβάς”, a traditional **Greek** dessert. (The name not being Greek does not prove anything.)
- If you go to Turkey, be sure to ask for “Baklava”, a traditional **Turkish** dessert.
- If you are in Tunis remember this story, which proves that Baklava is from **Tunis**: “Some people wanted to smuggle gold to Turkey and they put it in a Baklava. After the arrival they took the gold out, ate the Baklava and liked it. After that people in Turkey started also making baklava.” I personally doubt this story is true, because I could not stand such a long trip without eating the Baklava.

In general, during your journey you will realize that you will have to change pronunciation and spelling, and that Baklava has many origins! Except for the pronunciation and the spelling there are also differences in the amount and kind of nuts and spices and the consistency of the syrup.

Summary of Recipe

Baklava consists of the following:

- Very thin layers of a simple flour-water dough (“baklava leaves” or “fillo dough”) on bottom and on top. The easiest thing is to buy them (every Greek or Turkish store I have seen in the USA and Germany has it). You could make your own one since you need only wheat, water and some lemon, but it will take many hours, much effort and lots of skill, and I would say it is not worth it.
- Butter on each fillo.
- Chopped nuts between the dough layers.
- Syrup. This is the main difficulty of baklava, because it is not trivial to achieve the “correct” consistency (viscosity). A special thermometer might help.

It is hard to resist to Baklava, and some people go as far as describing it as healthy, because of the nuts and the wheat-based dough. Bear in mind though, that baklava contains butter, nuts and syrup in great quantities, and therefore baklava has many calories and saturated as well as unsaturated fats. Some people say it is heavy in the stomach, but my stomach disagrees!

The standard reaction I observed in people trying it for the first time was saying “Wow! This is too sweet” and then taking 3 more pieces.

Ingredients and Equipment

Before you start you should gather all the ingredients and be sure to have the right *equipment*. It is very important to have fresh ingredients.

- *A baking pan 25*35 cm*
- *A big sharp knife*

Filling

- *A large bowl (2 l)*
- *A blender or knife and wood to chop the nuts*
- 2.5 cups=600 ml (\approx 450g) chopped walnuts
- 2.5 cups=600 ml (\approx 500g) chopped almonds
- 1 tea-spoon powdered clove
- 1 tea-spoon powdered cinnamon

Dough

- *A small saucepan to melt the butter*
- *A small brush to apply the butter*
- 225g (1cup=240ml) melted butter
- One package (500g) fillo-dough
- Whole cloves (as many as the pieces of the baklava)

Syrup

- *A large (2 l), very clean saucepan*
- *A wooden spoon to stir*
- *A special thermometer (if you have one)*
- 480ml (2cups) water
- 675g sugar (3 cups=740ml)
- 175g honey (120 ml)

Recipe

Filling preparation

- Chop the nuts
- Mix the nuts with the spices in the bowl.

You can change the quantity or even take other kinds of nuts. Be careful with the spices, because too much of them make the baklava heavy in the stomach.

Dough

You should be working quickly so that the dough does not dry out. You might want to use a wet towel to put it over them to avoid evaporation.

- Melt the butter in the saucepan
- Count the fillo-layers and remember the number. You want to equally distribute the mixture and the butter.
- Butter the backing pan
- Place 4 fillo-sheets of dough, carefully buttered on top
- Spread some of the nut mixture
- Place two more fillo-sheets, buttered on top
- Spread some of the nut mixture
- Continue with 2 fillo-sheets and one layer of nuts
- At the end place again 4 fillo-sheets. The last one should have more butter than the others
- Cut in rhombuses, triangles or squares (20-60 pieces).
- In case you have butter left, pour it over the baklava
- Stick a clove in the middle of each piece. This is decorative and adds flavor and taste. It is better though not to eat them, because they are heavy in the stomach, and you might not like the taste (don't worry though, they are not poisonous).

At this point you can freeze the baklava if you wish to bake it at a later point.

In case you are not sure how much nuts you should put in each nut layer: let us say you have N fillo layers (typically $N \approx 20$). You place 4 on the bottom and 4 on the top. Then you have $(N-8)/2 \approx 6$ double-fillo layers in-between. That means you need to divide the nut into $(N-8)/2 + 1 \approx 7$ portions. An alternative is to place half the fillo-sheets on the bottom, then the nuts and then the remaining half fillo-sheets.

Baking

- The oven should be preheated at 175°C (≈345 F). For air heating choose 150°C (≈300F).
- Before putting the Baklava in the oven spray a few drops of cold water on it.
- Bake for 30-40 minutes.

Baklava is ready when the top layer gets a nice reddish color.

Syrup

About 5-10 minutes before taking out the baklava, start cooking the syrup.

- Dissolve the honey and the sugar in the cold water.
- Heat up the syrup and boil 108°C (≈226.4 F) for 5 minutes. You have to be very careful and stir very well.
- As soon as you take baklava out of the oven pour the syrup on it.

If you are not experienced, gifted or lucky the syrup is not likely to become “correct”. Don’t worry though, because the baklava will still taste good. You might want to watch an expert to get the right feeling.

Some remarks

- OK, that was it.
- You will have to wait for the baklava to cool down (1-3 hours).
- Don't put it in the refrigerator and don't cover it. If you do either the dough will not remain crunchy. Place it in a dry environment without smells. It remains fresh for a week (although I think you will eat it quicker than that).