

Lebanese Baklava

a recipe from www.maureenabood.com

As with most recipes, you will have greater success if you read through the entire recipe before proceeding. Baklava can be made in a variety of pan sizes. The goal is to have 20 sheets each on the top and bottom layers. The phyllo should be trimmed to fit the size of your pan. Most grocery stores sell either the small 1 lb. box with two packages, 20 sheets each, of 9"x14" sheets, or the large 1 lb. box with one package of 14"x18" sheets. Either way the quantity is one pound. If making a large sheet pan using the large package, you'll need two boxes of the large phyllo, placing one package of 20 leaves on top, and one package of 20 leaves on the bottom of the pastry. For this size you will need to increase the amounts of butter, syrup and nuts. Baklava can be made with pistachios or pecans rather than walnuts.

1 lb. box phyllo dough, room temperature

6 oz. ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) clarified butter, melted (measure *after* butter is clarified; clarify at least 8 oz. unsalted butter. See maureenabood.com for how to clarify butter.)

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup water

1 T lemon juice

2 t mazaher (orange blossom water)

3 cups walnuts

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar

Thaw the phyllo:

Refrigerate the frozen phyllo overnight, then bring to room temperature. Do not cut open the packages of phyllo until just before you are ready to assemble the baklava.

Make the orange blossom simple syrup:

In a small saucepan, combine sugar, water and lemon juice and bring to a boil over medium high heat. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. The lemon juice helps prevent crystallization. Add the mazaher, pour into another, heatproof, container and cool completely. It is essential to pour cool/room temperature syrup over the hot pastry when it comes out of the oven.

Make the sugared nuts:

The nuts can be coarsely chopped in the food processor with pulses, but be careful not to go too far. Some nut-dust is unavoidable, but it is better to have a few nuts that need to be broken by hand than to process too much, which will produce nuts that are too finely chopped.

Combine the walnuts, sugar, and mazaher, stirring until all of the nuts are coated and appear damp.

Assemble the baklava:

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

Open the phyllo and unroll it on top of the plastic it is packaged in. Keep the phyllo covered with a towel.

The size of the pan you use does not matter, but the pan should be metal (not dark or coated). For a 9"x13"x2" pan, trim the phyllo to fit. If you have the smaller box of phyllo, the two packages inside will need one inch trimmed off of the long side. If you have the larger box of phyllo, the one package of phyllo will need to be cut in half and trimmed to fit the pan. It's better to leave the phyllo a little larger than the pan because it will shrink when it bakes.

Brush the bottom of the pan with clarified butter. Lay one stack of 20 phyllo leaves in the pan. Spread the nuts over the phyllo in one even layer. Lay the second stack of 20 leaves over the nuts, taking care that the top layer is a sheet that is not torn. Take a layer from the center of the leaves for the top layer if necessary.

Brush the top layer with clarified butter. Using the tip of a very sharp chef's knife, cut the baklava into diamonds by cutting six rows (5 cuts) lengthwise and ten rows (9 cuts) crosswise on the diagonal. Lightly score the top with your knife so you can see where the cuts will be.

Use your dominant hand to cut and the other hand to hold the top layers of phyllo down while cutting, and be sure to cut all the way through to the bottom of the pan. This is essential so that the butter will seep through all layers. The knife is held almost perpendicular to the pastry, cutting straight down into the phyllo and nuts. The top layer will lift and in general make you want to curse as you cut, but just lay the phyllo back down where it belongs and move on. The sharper your knife, the easier the cutting will be.

Pour the melted clarified butter over the baklava evenly. Allow the butter to settle in, about 5 minutes. Bake on the oven shelf second from the top until deep golden brown, 50-60 minutes. Rotate the baklava halfway through baking.

Remove from the oven and immediately pour the 1 cup of the cooled syrup evenly over the baklava. When cool enough to handle, cut away a few morsels to eat warm. Let the rest sit, uncovered, for several hours or overnight to allow the syrup to absorb. Cut and serve from the pan as needed, keeping the baklava lightly, not tightly, covered with plastic wrap or waxed paper. The baklava will keep, in the pan, for two weeks.