

# Knafeh Jibneh

(shredded phyllo with cheese & orange blossom syrup)

a recipe from [www.maureenabood.com](http://www.maureenabood.com)

*There are several different ways knafeh with cheese is made. This recipe, based on one from DeDe Med, is most similar to the knafeh I've had at bakeries in Lebanon, with a finely-textured crust and melting cheese layer which is best eaten warm. The cheese layer is sometimes made from ricotta, cheese with no milk or farina mixed in, or a sweet cream rather than cheese. Traditionally the knafeh is eaten for breakfast or a snack, and is often tucked into a version of ka'ak that is a savory sesame bread. Ackawi cheese is a white, firm Arabic cheese that can be found in Middle Eastern markets. A great substitute is fresh mozzarella. If the cheese tastes very salty, slice it and soak it in water for a couple of hours to remove some of the salt. I like my cheese for knafeh to have a little salt flavor, though, so that the knafeh has a bit of wonderful salty-sweetness to it.*

*For the orange blossom syrup:*

1 cup sugar  
1 cup water  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
1-2 teaspoons mazaher, orange blossom water

*For the knafeh:*

3 cups, or ½ package, of shredded phyllo knafeh dough (kataifi)  
1 cup of panko or plain dry breadcrumbs  
1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted  
½ cup orange blossom syrup, plus more for serving  
2 cups mozzarella or ackawi cheese  
2 cups whole milk  
1/3 cup farina (cream of wheat)  
¼ cup chopped pistachio nuts, for garnish

To make the orange blossom syrup, in a small heavy 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. Add the mazaher, pour into a heatproof container and refrigerate to cool completely.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees with a rack in the middle position.

In the food processor, pulse the shredded phyllo dough for about a minute to make it into a fine meal. Place the phyllo in a medium bowl with the breadcrumbs. Add the melted butter and ½ cup of orange blossom syrup and stir until the phyllo is completely coated.

In a 10-inch clear pie plate or cake pan, add the buttery dough mixture. Compress it very well by pushing it into the bottom of the pan firmly, first with your hands, then pressing with the flat bottom of a cup, or something similar.

If the cheese is too salty, slice and soak it in cold water until some of the salt is pulled out. Change the water every 10 minutes or so. Either with a large, sharp knife or in the food processor, chop the cheese to a fine dice (in the processor, pulse until the cheese looks like coarse meal). Place the cheese in a medium bowl.

In a medium heavy saucepan, heat the milk over medium-high heat until it is hot, but not boiling. Add the farina and cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly, until the mixture is slightly thickened. Pour the farina over the cheese and stir to combine.

Pour the cheese mixture over the knafeh dough in the prepared pan, and smooth the top. Place in the oven and bake for 30-40 minutes, or until the knafeh is deep golden brown. Remove from the oven and cool for 15 minutes.

Turn the knafeh out onto a platter and drizzle with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of orange blossom syrup. Garnish with pistachio nuts. Serve immediately or set aside and reheat before serving. Cut into squares or slices and serve the knafeh warm, with more orange blossom syrup poured over each piece.