

# How to Strain Yogurt for Laban, Labne, and Labne Balls Preserved in Oil

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

*Here are straining times (for a towel-lined strainer, as opposed to hung with pressure, which will take less time) and results you can achieve. The yogurt will be fine if left unrefrigerated while it's being strained (which also contributes to its fermented flavor), but this can also be done under refrigeration.*

**Laban: Slightly strained, 2 hours.** I like a slightly strained yogurt for my day-to-day eating, topped with granola or honey or nothing at all, and this yogurt is great for baking and cooking (a full cup in my recent batch of meatballs, mixed with a touch of milk, was an excellent replacement for buttermilk). I always include a good spoonful of laban in the mix when I make hummus, which does the job on creaminess, suppleness. Slightly strained yogurt is the consistency of well-stirred mayonnaise.

**Labne: Very strained, 6-8 hours.** Yogurt strained this long becomes labne, a thick spread. This is what my Sitto ate every single morning on two pieces of buttered toast; she knew how to live. There is no doubt in my mind that I could survive just fine on a diet of labne, kalamata olives, and thin pita bread or Lebanese flat bread (plus dessert). There are very few Lebanese dishes that don't beg for a dollop of labne to complete the plate: kibbeh (raw, baked or footballs) mujadara, coosa, eggs, shish kebab, hushwe, lubieh, grape leaf rolls...the list is endless. Labne even improves, as cousin Vicky pointed out, chicken soup. Labne also makes wonderful dips for veggies or chips (with mix-ins like dill, cayenne, garlic or scallions), and appetizers—top crostini with labne and roasted tomatoes or roasted red bell pepper, and you are eating well. Mixed with a little milk and seasonings, labne is a cool, creamy salad dressing.

**Labne preserved in oil: 2 days.** This is yogurt-cheese, and it is special. Drain your labne way down to a very thick, cream cheese consistency, which takes a full 24 hours for laban made from ½ gallon of milk (longer for larger amounts).

Stir in salt to taste. From this thick labne, form little balls the size of walnuts and place those on a paper towel-lined sheet pan. Then top the balls with another paper towel. Leave them to continue to dry out for another day, changing out the paper towels whenever they get saturated with the whey. Reshape the balls in the palms of your hands to make them even rounder now, then place in a clean jar. Pour excellent-quality olive oil over the labne balls, cover, and keep refrigerated for many months, up to a year. Eat these topped with their olive oil and za'atar for breakfast, as part of a sophisticated cheese plate with bread or crackers, in a salad as you would goat cheese, or atop crostini like we did with the labne. It's not uncommon for these labne balls to be flavored with cayenne pepper and eaten spicy.