

Baklava - Μπακλαβάς (baklavas)



Baklava is a layered pastry dessert made of filo pastry sheets, filled with chopped nuts, and sweetened with syrup or honey. It was one of the most popular sweet pastries in the Ottoman Empire. There are many competing proposals for the origin of baklava, but there is no consensus on which of the options is true.

SERVES	PREP	COOK	TOTAL	CUISINE
Makes 24 pieces	30 minutes	50 minutes	1 hour 20 minutes	Greek

Ingredients

- 200 g (7 oz) walnuts, roughly chopped
- 100 g (3 1/2 oz) almonds, roughly chopped
- 2 tbsp caster sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- 375 g (13 oz) filo pastry, thawed if frozen
- 250 g (9 oz) unsalted butter, melted and kept warm
- 250 ml (9 fl oz) water
- 300 g (10 1/2 oz) caster sugar
- 150 g (5 1/4 oz) runny honey
- 1 strip lemon peel
- 1 strip orange peel
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 tbsp lemon juice



Method

1. Preheat the oven to 160°C fan (180°C, 350°F, gas mark 4). Lightly butter a 23 x 33 cm baking tin or roasting tin and set it aside.
2. Make the filling by combining the chopped walnuts, almonds, caster sugar, cinnamon and cloves in a bowl. Mix well so the spices are evenly distributed, then set aside.
3. For the syrup, put the water, caster sugar, honey, lemon peel, orange peel and cinnamon stick into a small saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce to medium-low and simmer for 8-10 minutes until slightly syrupy and aromatic.
4. Remove the syrup from the heat, stir in the lemon juice, and leave it to cool completely. It should be cool or barely warm before it touches the baked pastry, so the baklava stays crisp.
5. Unroll the filo and keep it covered with a clean, slightly damp tea towel. Lay one sheet in the tin, brush it lightly with melted butter, and repeat until you have 8 buttered sheets in the base.
6. Spread one third of the nut mixture evenly over the filo, then add 2 more buttered sheets. Repeat twice more with another third of the nuts and 2 sheets, then the final third of the nuts and 2 sheets.
7. Finish with 8 more buttered filo sheets on top, brushing each sheet lightly with butter and tucking the edges neatly into the tin. Use a sharp knife to cut the baklava right through into diamonds or squares before baking.
8. Bake on the middle shelf for 45-50 minutes until deeply golden and crisp on top and around the edges. If it browns too quickly, loosely cover with foil for the final 10 minutes.
9. As soon as the baklava comes out of the oven, spoon the cooled syrup evenly over the hot pastry, working gradually so it can absorb the syrup without flooding the tin.
10. Leave the baklava to cool completely at room temperature for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight, so the syrup settles and the layers firm up. Once cool, cut along the scores and lift out the pieces carefully with a palette knife.

To serve

Serve the baklava at room temperature on a platter, with the crisp top exposed and a little of the syrup glistening around the edges. It is excellent with Greek coffee or a glass of dessert wine, and needs nothing more than a few chopped pistachios or walnuts scattered over the top if you like a more decorative finish.

