

Desserts of the World: Greece

Presented March 19, 2019, by Sue Demos

Baklava

Ingredients

For the phyllo:

1-2 pounds completely thawed phyllo dough (size depends on the package and number of layers)
1 pound unsalted butter, melted, with foam skimmed off

For the filling:

1½ pounds coarsely ground walnuts (or use 1 pound walnuts plus 1 cup ground zwieback or graham crackers)
1 Tablespoon ground cinnamon
¾ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¾ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ cup sugar

For the syrup:

2 cups sugar
1 cup water
¼ cup fresh orange or lemon juice, or a mixture of the two
¼ cup honey
1 Tablespoon vanilla

Special equipment needed:

9x13 baking pan
Pastry brush
Food-safe spray bottle filled with water
Sharp knife to cut prebaked Baklava (I use a filet knife)

Directions

1. Position a rack in the lower third of the oven. Preheat to 350 degrees F.
2. Combine the filling ingredients in a bowl.
3. Brush a 9x13 baking dish with some of the melted butter and layer eight pieces of phyllo in the bottom of the pan, brushing each piece with butter before adding the next. (Note: Keep the unused phyllo covered with a damp towel during this process to keep it from drying out.)
4. Sprinkle a third of the nut mixture over the bottom layer of phyllo dough. Layer four pieces of phyllo on top of the nut mixture, brushing each with butter before adding the next. Sprinkle another third of the nut mixture on top and repeat with another four sheets of phyllo, brushing each piece with butter. Add the last third of the nut mixture and layer the last eight pieces of phyllo, brushing each piece with butter. (Note: You want to save untornd phyllo sheets for the top layer. If sheets tear, piece them together and use them in the middle.)
5. After brushing the top phyllo layer with extra butter, spray lightly with water. Before putting into the oven, cut the baklava into 1½-inch squares and cut again diagonally to make the traditional diamond shapes. (Cutting the baklava now will give space for the syrup to soak in and makes for a smoother top layer for presentation.)
6. Bake 1 hour until golden.



7. Meanwhile, make the syrup. Bring the sugar, water and juice to a boil in a saucepan over medium heat and cook, approximately 10 -15 minutes, until you get a thin thread of syrup when you raise the spoon from the pan. Add the honey and vanilla and cook just a few more minutes. Take off the heat and let it cool slightly.
8. Once the baklava is out of the oven, let it cool. You can pour the warm syrup over the cooled baklava, or if the baklava is warm, let the syrup cool and then pour it over the squares.
9. Cover loosely with wax paper or foil (nothing that will stick) and let the syrup soak in at room temperature for at least six hours or overnight.
10. You can store baklava at room temperature for up to two weeks in a covered container. If you want to retain the crispiness, store it at room temperature. Refrigeration will create a chewy texture.
11. Frozen baklava can be eaten up to five months after it was made. To freeze: place individual pieces of well-cooled baklava in a single layer on a baking pan lined with parchment paper and place in the freezer. When the baklava has frozen, triple-wrap for long-term freezer storage: wrap the desired amount of serving pieces first in wax paper or parchment (to prevent sticking), then tightly with aluminum foil and finally in an airtight container or freezer bag. To serve, thaw for four hours at room temperature or overnight in the refrigerator.