



KNAFEH

SWEET CHEESE WITH SHREDDED PHYLLO CRUST ROSE BLOSSOM UPSIDE-DOWN CHEESECAKE

For the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

Ingredients and amounts:

For the syrup (ater):

2 cups sugar
1 cup water
1 tablespoon orange blossom water
1 tablespoon rose blossom water
1 tsp lemon juice

For the crust

1 packet shredded filo dough (about 1 pound)
½ cup (95 grams) clarified butter
½ cup of Ater master syrup

For the filling

2 pounds whole-milk low-moisture mozzarella cheese or Oaxacan cheese,
soaked for 4 hours or more
Zest of 1 lemon

For garnish

1 ½ cup master syrup
½ cup finely ground raw pistachio

Directions

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Line a 9/13" baking sheet or 2 10" baking pans with a greased parchment paper.

Soak the cheese four hours, changing the water each hour or overnight in the refrigerator with at least one water change. Taste for saltiness; the cheese should have a mild taste.

To make syrup, dissolve sugar in lemon juice and water and bring to a boil. When it bubbles, reduce heat and let simmer uncovered, about 10 minutes, until thickened and can coat the back of your spoon. Add orange blossom and rose water and set aside to cool.

My general rule of thumb on this syrup: cold on hot pastry, hot on cold but never cold on cold or it will not be absorbed and never hot on hot or it will end up as mush.



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To make the crust, grind shredded phyllo and panko in a food processor for 2 to 3 minutes, until a fine crumble forms. Add in melted clarified butter and syrup, until the crust comes together like a dough. Divide the crust evenly between the two cake pans. Use your fingers to press into an even layer, then use the back of a soup spoon to press and smooth the crust into an even well-packed layer. It should resemble a graham cracker pie crust.

Bake 10 to 15 minutes until golden brown (take care not to let the crust burn, it will bake a second time with the cheese filling.) Remove the crusts from the oven and cool. Lower your oven to 350 degrees.

While crust is baking, invert and shake any remaining crumbs from the bowl of the processor (it does not need to be washed.) In the food processor, grind the cheese to a fine crumble.

Lay out cheese filling over the crust or divide it over two crusts if using cake pans. Zest your lemon evenly over the cheese filling. Return to the oven and bake another 5-10 minutes until the cheese mixture starts to bubble.

To serve, run a knife around the edges. Cover with a serving plate and flip, crust-side up. Divide the remaining syrup over the knafeh. Garnish with ground pistachio and serve piping hot.

Reem Assil is a Palestinian-Syrian chef based in Oakland, CA. She is the owner of Reem's California, a nationally acclaimed restaurant, inspired by her passion for Arab street corner bakeries and the vibrant communities that surround them.
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Reem's California offers the warmth of Arab hospitality through the discovery of flavors, aromas, and techniques of the modern Arab street corner bakery through fresh baked bread, using traditional Arab flavors and local ingredients, all prepared with California love. Reem's believes in the power of food to build strong resilient community and envisions to be an anchor space that provides good jobs, delicious, nourishing food, and a home to many.
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