

Baklava

Liz Smith

Can be frozen, to use as Christmas cookies

17" x 12" pan, 2" deep, such as a lasagna pan

1 lb. filo leaves-thawed overnight in refrigerator, or fresh, at the Armenian Bakery on Route 3 and Sproul Roads.

1 lb. butter, melted in a bowl- don't use any substitute! Stir the butter w/ your brush, often. It separates.

Combine in a large mixing bowl:

1 lb. chopped walnuts, pecans or lightly browned pistachios,

1 tablespoon cinnamon,

¼ tsp cloves, and

1 tabl sugar.

I chop my nuts in my Cuisinart. You can do the chopping and make the syrup the day before.

Melt butter in microwave, in a big bowl, Put bowl w/ butter, to the right of pan, bowl w/ nuts to the left of pan, above your opened sheets of filo. Keep filo covered up at all times w/ a dish towel, as you are spreading the nut layers. *

Brush bottom of pan w/melted butter. I use a new, clean, 4" paint brush for that purpose. Lay down one pastry sheet, brush w/ melted butter, repeating this process until four pastry sheets line the bottom of the baking pan. If the pan is too small for the large sheets, just fold each individual sheet over a little bit at the ends. Brush the fourth layer w/ melted butter and sprinkle on thin layer of nut mixture. I use a big cooking spoon to sprinkle the nuts, and I spread them around evenly w/ my fingers.

Add 2 more pastry sheets, brush w/ melted butter, sprinkle last one w/ nut mixture. Do 4, then nuts, then 2, then nuts, repeating this process of 4 and 2, until all of the sheets are used, ending w/ about four top layers. Brush top w/ remaining butter. Cut into 30 diamond shapes. (I use a yardstick to get my lines straight) A clove bud may be placed in center of each diamond pastry, if desired.

Bake the first ½ hour at 350 degrees, and the second ½ hour at 300 degrees, for a total of one hour, or until golden brown. During the last half-hour of baking, you may test, by removing the center piece of pastry w/ a toothpick. It is done when pastry sheets are all golden brown and not soggy. It is done when it almost pulls w/ a toothpick.

SYRUP-While pastry is baking, prepare the syrup, or make it before you start making the baklava. You want the filo to be hot and the syrup cool.

In a pan, combine and stir: 4 cups sugar, 1/8 tsp. cloves, a stick of cinnamon and 1 cup of water. Bring to a gentle boil. Reduce heat to simmer, uncovered, for 15 minutes. You should have the consistency of thin syrup. Off the heat, stir in ¼ cup of honey, and 2, one-inch strips of lemon rind. I recently had some fabulous Baklava, at Grounds for Sculpture. It had the zest of lemon, lime and orange peel in it, very finely grated. It was also very colorful. I don't know the amount..... It also had browned pistachios instead of walnuts.

Spoon the cool syrup over hot pastry. Let it soak in for at least an hour, before you remove the Baklava from the pan. It will continue to absorb the syrup for several hours. You may have some syrup lying in the bottom of the pan. No problem. If you make the syrup the day before, do not store it in the refrigerator.

* It is very important not to let your filo dry out as you go along. Place a slightly damp, not dripping wet, dish towel over the top of your filo leaves. You may not be able to have the exact number of filo leaves come out evenly, as the recipe requires. As w/many other things, today's packages of filo, don't contain as many sheets as they did in the early 60s, when I was given this recipe.