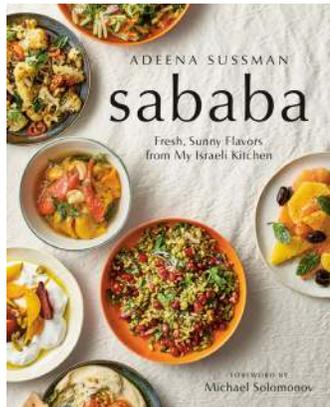


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SEEDED ZA'ATAR CRACKERS

(Za'atar Malatit)

Makes 80 crackers (or more depending on how thin you roll the dough)

Active Time: 25 minutes

Total Time: 1 hour (including cooling)

1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more as needed

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

⅓ cup raw sesame seeds

3 tablespoons Za'atar

3 tablespoons nigella seeds

2 teaspoons kosher salt

2 teaspoons baking powder

¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Arrange the oven racks in the top third and lower third of the oven and preheat the oven to 350°F.

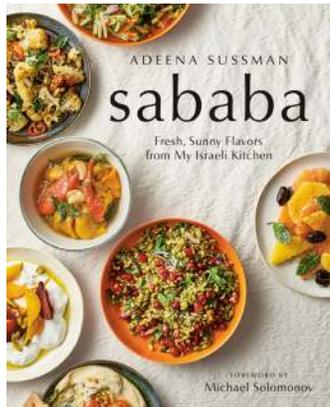
In a large bowl, combine the flour, olive oil, sesame seeds, za'atar, nigella seeds, salt, baking powder, and red pepper flakes and mix well to incorporate. Add ½ cup water, mixing until the dough is pliable, a bit spongy even, but no longer sticky (give the dough a minute to absorb the water and oil; it will become less sticky with a very short rest), adding more flour by the tablespoonful if necessary. Divide the dough into 2 equal pieces. Roll out each piece of dough between 2 large sheets of parchment paper to ⅛ inch thickness (or even a bit thinner if you like wispiest crackers). While still between the 2 sheets of parchment, transfer the dough to a large, preferably unrimmed baking sheet and peel off the top layer of parchment. Using a pastry wheel, pizza cutter, or sharp chef's knife, cut the dough into 2-inch squares, then cut them on the diagonal into triangles. Repeat the same procedure with the remaining dough.

Bake, rotating the baking sheets midway through, until the crackers have separated themselves and are golden and fragrant, 15 to 16 minutes total. Remove the crackers from the oven and cool completely on the baking sheets (if any have stuck together, gently separate them with your hands once they're cool enough to touch). The crackers will keep stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 week, or can be frozen for up to 6 months.

LABANEH

Active Time: 10 minutes

Total Time: minimum 4 hours, maximum 24



I always keep thick, tart labaneh, or strained yogurt, in my fridge to spread it on a plate underneath roasted vegetables (Lemony Cauliflower over Labaneh, page 126), for instance, or even to enhance desserts like my Labaneh Malabi Panna Cotta (page 334). Here in Israel, you can buy it by weight from the cheese monger, purchase it in prepackaged tubs, or—best of all—easily make it at home, which has several advantages. For one thing, you get to control what goes in the labaneh and how you season it (I keep it simple with salt). All you do is mix up the ingredients, tie them up in a clean cloth, and hang it over a bowl where it drips to your preferred level of viscosity depending on how long you let it drip, drip, drip. What’s surprising is just how much of yogurt is actually water; try different brands of yogurt to see which works best for you and how much liquid emerges from each type. Though most labanehs call just for yogurt, my friend and colleague Tressa Eaton’s mother-in-law, Roni Darom, adds a bit of sour cream, which lends extra creaminess; feel free to do so, or to just use more yogurt.

4 cups whole-milk yogurt

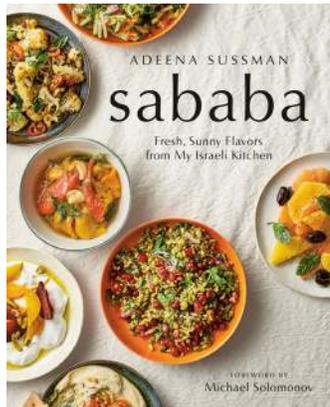
½ cup sour cream (optional), or more yogurt

1 tablespoon kosher salt, or more to taste

Extra-virgin olive oil (optional), for labaneh balls

Makes 1¾ to 2 cups

If you are hanging the labaneh, find your hanging spot and make sure there’s room underneath it for a bowl to collect the drippings (unless you are hanging it directly over a sink or shower, which also works). If you are straining the labaneh over a bowl, fit an 8- or 10-inch mesh colander over a bowl and line it with a linen or flour sack kitchen towel or three layers of heavy-duty paper towels. In a large bowl whisk together the yogurt, sour cream (if using), and salt until smooth. Pour the yogurt mixture onto the cloth, gather up the edges, and tie them into a knot. Strain over the colander into the bowl, or hang on a hook over a bowl or sink until you achieve the desired texture (all of this is done at room temperature, not in the fridge).



LABANEH CONTINUED

4-Hour Labaneh: For looser labaneh, like the one I use in Labaneh Malabi Panna Cotta (page 334), strain for 4 hours.

8-Hour Labaneh: For thicker labaneh similar in texture to thick Greek yogurt and ideal for spreading under salads like Lemony Cauliflower over Labaneh (page 126), strain for 8 hours.

12-Hour Labaneh: (pictured facing page, top right): To achieve something akin to thick cream cheese, or if you're making labaneh balls (see below), go anywhere from 12 to 24 hours.

To make labaneh balls (pictured facing page, bottom right): Roll the 12- to 24-Hour Labaneh into 1-inch balls (roll in za'atar if desired). Arrange in a clean jar, cover with olive oil, and seal with a tight-fitting lid. Stored in the refrigerator in an airtight container, labaneh keeps for 2 weeks; labaneh balls keep for 1 month.

THREE THINGS TO DO WITH LABANEH

Labaneh's tangy versatility works beautifully underneath simple preparations both savory and sweet. These are just six of the countless ways you can go here. I like to use the 8-Hour Labaneh here, but if you like a looser consistency by all means use the 4-Hour version.



CARAMELIZED PINEAPPLE WITH SUMAC

Dredge 1 cup thinly sliced pineapple in sugar. Caramelize in a skillet over medium-low heat until golden, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Add 2 tablespoons butter and swirl to melt; brown slightly. Cool and spoon over labaneh; sprinkle with sumac.



WILD MUSHROOMS AND THYME

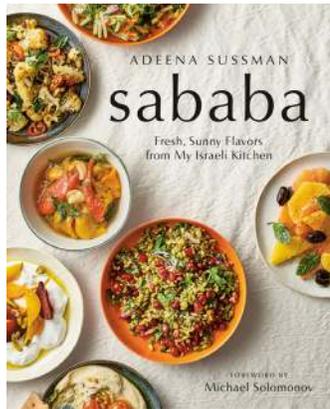
Heat a dry, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Sear 1½ cups mixed wild mushrooms (don't crowd the pan) until charred and slightly wilted, 7 to 8 minutes. Add olive oil or butter, salt, pepper, and a thyme sprig and warm through. Spoon onto labaneh; garnish with thyme.



CRISPY ARTICHOKE HEARTS

Quarter 4 whole, cleaned baby artichoke hearts (inner leaves attached) or canned or marinated artichoke hearts; pat them dry. Deep fry in vegetable oil until crispy and golden, 4 to 5 minutes. Drain on paper towels. Season with salt and pepper; serve over labaneh. Drizzle with olive oil and garnish with parsley.

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PECAN-LIME MUHAMARRA DIP

Makes 2 cups

- 3 large bell peppers, charred
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup toasted pecans
- $\frac{1}{2}$ small pita, torn into small pieces, or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses, plus more to taste
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lime juice, plus more to taste
- 1 garlic clove, smashed
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes, or more to taste
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

In the bowl of a food processor, combine the bell peppers, pecans, pita, pomegranate molasses, lime juice, garlic, cumin, salt, and red pepper flakes and process until almost smooth, 30 seconds.

With the motor running, drizzle in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the oil until incorporated. Season with more lime juice, pomegranate molasses, and salt, spread on a plate, and drizzle with the remaining olive oil.

**To toast pecans, bake in a preheated 350°F oven until fragrant, 5 to 6 minutes. Transfer to a plate to cool.*