

KITCHEN AFFAIRS

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Baklava **(with Clove and Orange Liqueur Syrup)**

The word “planet” comes from the Greek meaning “the wanderer,” because the planets, as opposed to the fixed stars, move about the night sky. Baklava, Greece’s most famous honey-syruped treat, deserves the same title, for it is truly a “planetary” dessert. With its flaky crust, lavish nut filling, and delectable syrup, Baklava is the confection that has wandered from country to country across the globe. Today it can be found and enjoyed almost everywhere. Here the syrup is a Clove and Orange Liqueur Syrup.

1 cup (about 4 ounces) walnuts, finely chopped but not ground
1 cup (2 to 3 ounces) finely chopped almonds, or a mixture of almonds with hazelnuts or pistachios
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 cup (2 sticks) plus 2 tablespoons butter, melted
32 sheets commercial filo dough

- (1) Preheat the oven to 350 F.
- (2) Mix the walnuts, almonds, cinnamon, and 2 tablespoons of the melted butter together in a small bowl. Set it aside.
- (3) Brush the bottom and sides of a 13 x 9-inch baking pan with some of the remaining melted butter. Trim the filo sheets to fit the pan. Butter and layer 8 filo sheets on the bottom of the pan. Spread one third of the nut mixture evenly over the filo. Butter and layer another 8 filo sheets over the nuts. Spread another third of the nut mixture over them. Repeat the layers once more, and end with the last 8 filo sheets. Liberally brush some of the remaining butter over the top and edges of the filo.
- (4) Using a sharp knife, cut through all the layers, making 15 to 18 diamond or square shapes. Place the dish in the oven and bake for 20 minutes.
- (5) Pour the remaining butter over the top of the baklava, and continue baking until it is pale golden on top and crisp to the touch, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove the dish from the oven and set it aside until the liquid is no longer sizzling, 5 minutes.
- (6) Pour the syrup into the cuts between the pieces and around the edges of the dish, taking care to avoid pouring it over the top (which would make it soggy). Set the baklava aside to cool. Then cover it and let it rest for several hours or as long as overnight, so the pastry can soak up the syrup. It will keep at room temperature for 3 days.



Baklava with Clove and Orange Syrup, (continued)

Clove and Orange Liqueur Syrup

By the first century C.E., the Greeks knew of oranges as the fruit began to spread from its homeland, China. They called them *narantsion*, which became *aurnitium* in Latin – and eventually “orange” in English. The fruit was not widely grown around the Mediterranean until the Arabs spread its cultivation around one thousand years later; just about the same time the Egyptians had developed ways to process sugar.

The union of fruit juices with sugar allowed for the formation of sweet fruit syrups and liqueurs, and sweetening the abundant, redolent juice of the orange was a natural. Orange water became a popular ingredient among late Byzantine and other cooks, used especially to flavor sweets. Orange is still a beloved enhancement for cakes, spoon sweets, and soaking syrups.

Strangely, though ancient Greeks knew of the orange, the variety that is cultivated now in such profusion is an especially sweet type bred in Portugal, and the name for oranges today in Greece is *portokali*.

Makes 3/4 cup

4 whole cloves
1 piece (1 inch) cinnamon stick
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup orange-flavored liqueur, such as Triple Sec
3/4 cup water

Combine all ingredients in a small saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Stir, reduce the heat, and simmer briskly until thickened, reduced, and slightly golden, 15 minutes. Allow the syrup to cool to room temperature, then remove the cloves and cinnamon stick and use.

Notes:

- There are many versions of the nut filling for baklava. At its most traditional, the filling is all walnuts or a combination of walnuts and almonds. But the pie filling can include hazelnuts alone, walnuts and hazelnuts, or almonds alone. Some versions combine pistachios with walnuts or almonds, or are made of all pistachio. Others mix all the Mediterranean nuts, including pine nuts. An American rendition can even include pecans. Some Greek cooks add currants or raisins, an addition that I find overwhelmingly sweet. It's fun to try different nut fillings; just keep the quantity the same.
- Some Greek bakers build baklava with three, not four, layers of filo and two, not three, layers of filling.
- Sweet filo pies use more layers of dough than savory pies.
- [Syrups] can be kept, covered, in the refrigerator indefinitely, but need to be rewarmed to a runny [consistency] before pouring over a filo sweet or cake.