

Everyday Healthy! Everyday Delicious!

From the Kitchen of Janice Feuer Haugen

Yoghurt Cheese – Labneh

As a holiday hors d'oeuvre, serve the yoghurt cheese or labneh as they do in Lebanon with pita bread and vegetables. Spread the labneh on a plate. Sprinkle it with [za'atar](#) (zahtar) and mint and decorate it with olives. Yoghurt cheese also makes a great light lunch, breakfast and sandwich spread.

4 cups organic, plain whole milk yogurt
½ teaspoon fine, mineral-rich salt (i.e., Celtic, Himalayan)

1. Line a strainer with four layers of damp cheesecloth. Place the strainer over a glass or ceramic bowl or measuring cup.
2. Stir the salt into the yoghurt. Transfer the yoghurt into the cheesecloth-lined strainer.
3. Gather together and tie up the ends of the cheesecloth.
4. If it is cool in your kitchen, let the yoghurt drain for 4-8 hours sitting on a kitchen counter. Otherwise place everything in the refrigerator and let it drain overnight. The consistency will be similar to cream cheese—thick yet spreadable.
5. Remove from the cheesecloth and store your yoghurt cheese in the fridge for up to two weeks.
6. Store the liquid whey in a clean jar in the fridge. Add the whey to smoothies, bread doughs and/or any number of recipes for fermented beverages, vegetables and fruits.

Note: The longer the yoghurt drains, the thicker and denser the yoghurt cheese becomes. After 24 hours of draining, you can make Labneh Korat—yoghurt cheese balls. Make walnut-size balls (I like to use a small scoop) and drop them into a clean glass jar filled with olive oil. Storing them in olive oil increases their life to about 6 months.

* Perhaps you remember reading about the Middle Eastern herbal blend [za'atar](#) from my trip to [Sahadi's](#) in Brooklyn in September. You can make your own according to the recipe below from [Fine Cooking Magazine](#) or order it online from [Penzey's](#).

Homemade Substitute for Za'atar

[From Fine Cooking Magazine](#)

To make about 1/2 cup of za'atar
3 Tbs. dried thyme
1 Tbs. lightly toasted sesame seeds
1 Tbs. ground sumac
1/2 tsp. dried oregano or marjoram
1/4 tsp. kosher salt

Put everything in a spice grinder. Pulse a few times to mix and break up some of the seeds—there should still be many whole seeds visible. Store the za'atar in a cool, dark place for up to six months.

When sumac is unavailable, substitute 2 Tbs. dried lemon peel.