

How to Make 'Kunafa'?

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
List of Ingredients/Equipment.....	2
Step-by-Step Instructions.....	3
Short brief instructions with illustrations.....	4 - 5
Resources.....	6

Introduction

'Food is Culture'

Throughout history, food evolved from a basic necessity into an indicator of social statuses and religious and political identity. Everything that is associated with food signifies a cultural act. Starting from the capture of the food, its ingredients, cultivation, preparation, and consumption represents a cultural character that distinguishes any group of people from others. Even the "choices" made by cooks and the ingredients used were determined by a culture of economics (availability) and medicine (digestibility and nutrition) that led to the development of specific social structures and traditions. The transmission of recipes allowed food to acquire its own language and grow into a complex cultural product shaped by climate, geography, the pursuit of pleasure, and later on, the desire for health.

The 'Kunafa'

Every culture has a distinguished cuisine of food, drinks and desserts. In the Middle East for instance, the dessert dishes constitute a major part of the Middle Eastern cuisine. One of the most famous desserts and my personal favorite is the 'Kunafa'. It is basically a cheese pastry soaked in sweet sugar-based syrup, typical of the regions belonging to the former Ottoman Empire. It is a dessert specialty of areas in the Levant, mainly Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria.

Stories on the history and origin of Kunafa are many. However, the most famous one says that Kunafa made its way to the Levant through the Turkish Ottomans, when the Palestinians adopted the recipe and enhanced the flavor to its modern state. Their addition was simply stuffing the pastry with cheese and then garnishing it with a touch of margarine, sugar syrup and sprinkles of crushed pistachio. The cheese stuffing could be replaced with cream and in some cases even vanilla ice-cream. There are three types of Kunafa pastry: *khishnah* (rough) where the crust would be made from long thin noodle threads, *na'ama* (fine) where the dough would be made from semolina, and *mhayara* (mixed) which is a mixture of *khishnah* and *na'ama*.

The Kunafa is usually served during special events and occasions. It is also a really popular dish during the holy month of Ramadan. It should be consumed while hot right after the dough absorbs the syrup. However, making a kunafa is not an easy process. It requires time and practice to reach its right taste, texture and appearance.

List of Ingredients/Equipment

Equipment:

- Refrigerator
- Saucepan , pan
- Oven
- Knife
- Large bowl
- Spatula
- Large platter
- Cake stand
- Flask

Ingredients:

These ingredients serve a party of 10.

(Tbsp is a tablespoon; tsp is a teaspoon)

(1 cup = 237 mL = 2.4 dl; 1 Tbsp = 15 mL; 1 tsp = 5 mL); all are level measurements.

- 1 lb (454 g) Akawi cheese – (or Mozzarella)
- 2 cups (400 g) Granulated white sugar
- 1 cup (237 mL) Water
- 1 Tbsp (15 mL) Lemon juice
- 1 tsp (10 mL) Rose water – Or orange blossom water
- ½ cup (120 g) Ricotta cheese – Or cottage cheese
- 1 Tbsp (15 mL) Unsalted butter (melted) – For the pan
- ½ tsp (2.5 mL) Kunafa pastry coloring – Or orange food coloring (Found in most international markets)
- 1 lb (454 g) Kataifi shredded dough – (Found in most international markets)
- ½ cup (118 mL) Milk
- ¾ cup (187 mL) Unsalted butter (melted) – And lukewarm
- 3 Tbsp (45 mL) Pistachio (ground)

Recipe from <http://xawaash.com/?p=6888#sthash.S1QXxJZg.Pi0rfgu9.dpbs>

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Desalt the cheese if salty. It is preferable to use the 'akawi' or mozzarella cheese. After cutting the cheese into 1 inch (2.5 cm) cubes, soak it in cold water in the refrigerator for 6 hours or overnight. Change the water twice. After soaking, rinse with cold water then drain and pat dry using paper towels. Shred the cheese and mix it with the ricotta or cottage cheese.
2. Mix water, sugar and lemon juice and then boil the mixture using medium heat for 10 minutes. After you turn off the heat, add the rose water. Let the mixture cool down completely.
3. Add butter and coloring to the bottom and sides of a 10 in. (25 cm) round 2 in. deep pan with 1 tablespoon of melted butter and ½ teaspoon of the kunafa pastry coloring.
4. Cut the kataifi dough into 4 equal pieces. Add milk and lukewarm butter. Make sure that the kataifi is fluffy and that there are no lumps.
5. Place ⅔ of the kataifi in the pan. Press down with the flat side of the spatula.
6. Add all of the previously prepared cheese. Level the mixture of dough and cheese and and press down.
7. Cover the dough with the remaining ⅓ of the kataifi. Press well with the palms of your hand to level it down, you could also use a spatula.
8. For 40 minutes, bake in a preheated oven at 350°F/177°C. After the 40 minutes, let the kunafa cool down for 10 minutes before transferring it into a large platter or cake stand.
9. Add the crushed ground pistachio on top. The syrup could be poured on the whole kunafa or on individual servings.



Image from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-3-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>

Short Brief Instructions with Illustrations:

1. Get the kataifi dough.



Image 1

2. Mix butter and milk with the kataifi dough.



Image 2

3. Add butter and kunafa coloring to the bottom and sides of the pan. Insert the dough mixed with cheese and butter into the pan. Spread evenly.



Image 3

4. Cut the akawi cheese.



Image 4

5. Prepare the cheese filling.



Image 5

6. Mix the previously prepared dough with the cheese filling. Spread evenly to prepare it for baking.



Image 6

7. Place into the oven for 40 minutes.



Image 7

8. Remove from the oven and transfer it to a cake platter. Add the crushed pistachio and syrup.



Image 8

Resources:

Image 1 from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-2-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>

Image 2 from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-6-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>

Image 3 from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-7-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>

Image 4 from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-8-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>

Image 5 from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-9-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>

Image 6 from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-10-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>

Image 7 from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-11-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>

Image 8 from <http://xawaash.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Cheese-Kunafa-12-Somali-Food-Blog.jpg>