

LABNEH PANCAKES

with Sour Cherry Compote & Za'atar Butter

Robert Meyers-Lussier

PREP 20 MIN | COOK 30 MIN | MAKES 12 PANCAKES | SERVES 4

Labneh — strained yogurt, thick as cream cheese and lightly tangy — replaces buttermilk in the batter here, reacting with baking soda to produce pancakes that are airy, tender, and almost half an inch thick. The compote is built in the Turkish *vişne reçeli* tradition: sour cherries, sugar, and a cinnamon stick, finished off-heat with a small measure of orange blossom water. The za'atar butter is bloomed in melted fat to smooth the herb particles, then finished with raw sumac added off-heat to preserve its bright citrusy aromatics. Three teaspoons of cornstarch in the compote, not one. The stove had the final word.

INGREDIENTS

Za'atar Butter

- 4 tablespoons (57g) unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon za'atar blend
- ½ teaspoon raw sumac
- Pinch of flaky salt (if za'atar blend is unsalted)

Sour Cherry Compote

- 2 cups (480ml) jarred unsweetened sour cherries, drained, ¼ cup liquid reserved
- ½ cup (65g) granulated sugar
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 3 teaspoons (9g) cornstarch mixed with 2 tablespoons reserved cherry liquid
- ¼ teaspoon orange blossom water

Pancake Batter

- 1½ cups (190g) all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¾ cup (170g) labneh, room temperature
- ¾ cup (180ml) whole milk, plus 1 tablespoon as needed
- 2 large eggs

- 3 tablespoons (43g) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
 - ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 - Neutral oil or butter for the pan
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METHOD

1. Make the za'atar butter.

Melt **4 tablespoons butter** in a small saucepan over low heat. Add **1 tablespoon za'atar** and cook, stirring, for **30 to 60 seconds** until fragrant. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature, about **10 minutes**. Stir in **½ teaspoon raw sumac** and a pinch of flaky salt if needed. The butter will re-emulsify as it cools; stir to combine before using.

2. Build the compote.

Combine **2 cups drained sour cherries**, **■ cup sugar**, and the **cinnamon stick** in a small saucepan over medium heat. Stir until sugar dissolves and the mixture begins to simmer, about **5 minutes**. Add **1 teaspoon lemon juice**. Whisk the cornstarch slurry to recombine, then stir into the cherry mixture. Cook, stirring, until the compote thickens and coats a spoon, about **2 minutes**. Remove from heat. Discard the cinnamon stick. Stir in **¼ teaspoon orange blossom water**. Set aside to cool slightly.

3. Make the batter.

Whisk together **flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt** in a large bowl. In a separate bowl, whisk together **labneh, milk, eggs, melted butter, and vanilla** until smooth. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and fold together until just combined — a few streaks of flour are fine. The batter will puff visibly as the labneh reacts with the baking soda. If the batter seems too thick to spread, add the remaining **1 tablespoon milk** and fold in gently.

4. Cook the pancakes.

Heat a griddle or nonstick skillet over medium heat. Brush lightly with neutral oil or butter. Working in batches, pour **¼ cup batter** per pancake. Cook until bubbles form across the surface and the edges look set, about **2 to 3 minutes**. Flip and cook until the underside is golden, about **1 to 2 minutes** more. Transfer to a warm oven (200°F / 95°C) while you finish the remaining pancakes.

5. Serve.

Stack pancakes on warmed plates. Spoon the cherry compote over the top. Drizzle the za'atar butter over everything, letting it pool into the compote. Serve immediately.

HIGH-ALTITUDE ADJUSTMENTS (~5,900 FT)

- Reduce baking powder to 1¾ teaspoons.
 - Reduce baking soda to **■** teaspoon.
 - The batter will still puff on contact — do not overmix.
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CHEF'S NOTES

- **Labneh:** Full-fat labneh produces the most tender crumb. Do not substitute Greek yogurt — it is thinner and will alter the batter consistency.
 - **Cornstarch:** Three teaspoons is the correct amount for jarred unsweetened cherries. Frozen cherries release more liquid and may require up to 4 teaspoons.
 - **Orange blossom water:** A quarter teaspoon is the ceiling. Add it off-heat. More will overwhelm the cherry.
 - **Za'atar blooming:** The 30 to 60 second bloom smooths the dried herb particles and releases volatile oils into the fat. Do not skip this step.
 - **Raw sumac:** Added after the butter cools to preserve its citrusy aromatics. Blooming sumac with the za'atar mellows it too much.
 - **Batter puffing:** The labneh and baking soda react immediately on contact. Fold gently and cook promptly — do not let the batter rest.
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MAKE-AHEAD & LEFTOVERS

- Compote keeps refrigerated for up to 5 days. Reheat gently over low heat.
 - Za'atar butter keeps refrigerated for up to 1 week. Bring to room temperature and stir before using.
 - Cooked pancakes reheat well in a 325°F (165°C) oven for 8 minutes. Do not microwave — they lose their texture.
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