Bread & baking / Lebanon

# Manakeesh

Lebanon's beloved morning flatbread — pillowy yeasted dough flattened into rounds and painted with a paste of za'atar and olive oil, then baked until the edges crisp and the herb-oil bubbles into a fragrant, dark-green crust.

**Time** 90 min **Servings** 4

## What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 % All-purpose flour
- ☐ 8 % Extra-virgin olive oil
- ☐ 2 % Fine sea salt
- ☐ 30 % Za'atar spice blend
- ☐ 60 % Warm water (38-40 C)
- ☐ 1.5 % Instant yeast
- ☐ 1 % Sugar
- ☐ 20 % Extra-virgin olive oil (for the topping)

## Let's make it.

**01** In a large bowl, combine warm water, sugar, and yeast. Stir and let sit for 5 minutes if using active dry yeast (instant can go straight in with the flour). Add flour, salt, and olive oil. Mix with your hand or a wooden spoon until no dry flour remains and a shaggy, cohesive dough forms. The dough should be soft, slightly tacky, and pull together into one mass. Turn out onto an unfloured surface and knead for 6–8 minutes until smooth and elastic. The dough should not stick aggressively to the surface — a light tack is correct.

**02** Form the dough into a smooth ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, and cover with a damp cloth or plastic wrap. Proof in a warm spot (28–32 C) for 45–60 minutes, until doubled in size. Street bakers in Beirut do a single warm rise at 40 C for 30 minutes; home bakers can also proof in a cold fridge overnight for a better flavour and a slower rise. The dough is ready when it looks puffy and jiggly and a finger poke leaves a slow-filling indent.

**03** Combine za'atar spice blend and olive oil in a small bowl and stir into a thick, spreadable paste. The ratio should be roughly 3 parts za'atar to 2 parts oil — thick enough to coat a spoon and not run freely, but fluid enough to spread easily without tearing the dough. Taste the paste: it should be assertively herby, sour, and savory. Add more za'atar if it tastes only of oil; add more oil if it clumps dryly. Let the paste rest for 2 minutes for the herbs to hydrate slightly.

04 Preheat your oven to its maximum temperature — 250–270 C — with a baking stone or heavy baking sheet on the center rack for at least 30 minutes. Divide the proofed dough into equal balls (about 150 g each for individual portions). On a lightly floured surface, press and stretch each ball into a round disc 5–6 mm thick and roughly 20 cm in diameter. The edge should be slightly thicker than the center. Spoon 2–3 tablespoons of za'atar paste onto the center of each round and use the back of the spoon to spread it to within 1 cm of the edge in an even layer.

05 Slide the topped manakeesh onto the screaming-hot baking stone or preheated sheet. Bake at maximum oven heat for 6–8 minutes, until the edges are golden-brown and crisped, the za'atar paste is bubbling and fragrant, and the underside is golden-brown and pulls away from the surface with a crunch. The za'atar topping will darken noticeably — this is expected and correct. Serve immediately: manakeesh is a bread that must be eaten hot, folded in half like a soft taco, and consumed within minutes of baking.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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