

Bob's Lebneh & Za'atar Dip

What is Lebneh? Labneh is a type of soft cheese that has been part of traditional Lebanese cuisine for eons. If you can't find it in the grocery, you can make it. It's basically Greek yogurt that has had much of the extra whey removed to become about the consistency of cream cheese. Do this by taking plain unflavored Greek yogurt available at most groceries and placing an amount in a double layered cheese cloth and make it into a bag. Twist the top and by pressing squeeze out some of the whey. After you have some of the easy part drained, place the 'bag' on a plate and then place a weight on the top. Leave it for a time to drain more of the whey from the bag. Continue to drain the plate of the whey liquid as needed. Continue for a few hours up to 24 hours until the yogurt inside becomes about the thickness and consistency of cream cheese. Now you are ready to continue.

What is Za'atar? It is a family of related Middle Eastern herbs that contains among other things sesame seeds and dried sumac. The name *za'atar* alone most properly applies to *Origanum syriacum*, considered in biblical scholarship to be the hyssop (Hebrew: *אֵזוֹב* [e'zov]) of the Hebrew Bible. Much like curry powder (not by taste) za'atar has hundreds of actual recipes. See the recipe in another document to see my version of Za'atar.

Ingredients

- 1 cup Lebneh
- 1 cup cream cheese
- 1-2 tablespoons Za'atar
- 2-4 tablespoons Feta Cheese
- 1 Garlic bud finely diced
- Oil if needed – a light oil like grape seed, almond, or canola unless you wish to add a little more strength you can use olive oil. Taste the oil first as extra virgin olive oil can add a bitter taste you may not want
- Salt to taste

Process

Make the Lebneh as suggested above. Take about 1 cup or what ever quantity you have made and add an equal amount of cream cheese. I find generally that the Lebneh made from store bought Greek yogurt is a bit strong in taste at least for a dip. You won't have to cut it with cream cheese if you are using the Lebneh for some other recipe where a small amount is used. Add the za'atar, feta cheese and garlic in the correct proportion. That is if you come up with 3 cups rather than 2 cups of lebneh plus cream cheese, then modify the amounts appropriately. Put the mixture in a food processor and process until nicely mixed. Taste and add some salt if needed. If the mixture is too thick add some oil and process to your desired density. When finished, place in the refrigerator for a few hours to a day covered with plastic. This should easily keep in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks or more.

This dip works well with small pieces of pita bread, pita crackers, and/or fresh cut raw vegetables like green onions, carrots, fennel (also known sometimes as sweet anise bulb) – use both the bulb and some of the tops with the feathery leaves, sweet peppers, celery, etc. Be sure to cut the vegetables into nice bite size pieces.

I used this dip as a starter for a Mediterranean meal I prepared. You can check out the other recipes and full menu [here](#):

<http://www.snydersmart.com/courthouseladies/index.html#med>



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