

## PAN-PRESSED BAKED KIBBEH // Kibbeh bil Saniyeh

filling, the Armenian way

16 oz minced beef  
1 tablespoon water  
1 1/2 cups finely diced onion  
1 1/4 teaspoons salt  
2/3 teaspoon black pepper  
1/8 teaspoon white pepper  
2/3 teaspoon allspice  
a dash of cinnamon  
a pinch of nutmeg  
1 tablespoon unsalted butter  
1/4-to-1/3 cup pine nuts, lightly toasted

filling, the Middle Eastern way

16 oz minced beef  
1 tablespoon water  
1-to-1 1/2 teaspoons 7-spice baharat blend or store-bought kibbeh spice  
1 tablespoon unsalted butter  
1/4-to-1/3 cup pine nuts, lightly toasted  
1 tablespoon pomegranate molasses, optional

kibbeh, the Armenian way

16 oz fat free triple processed top round beef, set aside 4 tablespoons  
2 1/2 cups extra-fine dark bulgur  
1 cup water (for soaking), plus an additional 1/4 cup (for kneading)  
1/4-to-1/2 cup coarse semolina, farina  
1 1/2-to-2 teaspoons fine Himalayan pink salt  
1 teaspoon red pepper paste  
2 teaspoon red Aleppo pepper  
1/4 teaspoon finely ground black pepper

kibbeh, the Middle Eastern way

16 oz fat-free triple processed top round beef, set aside 4 tablespoons  
2 1/2 cups extra-fine dark bulgur  
1 cup water (for soaking), plus an additional 1/4 cup (for kneading)  
1/4-to-1/2 cup coarse semolina, farina  
1 1/2-to-2 teaspoons fine Himalayan pink salt  
1-to-2 tablespoons kammouneh, recipe included

3 tablespoons sunflower oil  
3 tablespoons clarified butter, melted  
1 tablespoon samneh baladi, or a light splatter of water

kammouneh, a Southern Lebanese seasoning

1 tablespoon dried wild mint  
1/4 cup dried marjoram  
2 tablespoons dried basil  
2 tablespoons cumin  
2 tablespoons red Aleppo pepper  
2 tablespoons allspice  
2 tablespoons black pepper  
2 tablespoons cloves  
1/4 cup cinnamon sticks  
1/4 cup dried small Damask rose petals

Prepare filling. Add minced beef and a tablespoon of water to a saucepan and sauté, breaking up lumps, until liquid is almost gone and natural meat fats starts to sizzle. Add a tablespoon of butter and stir-cook for about a minute. Add onion and sauté for a bit longer until just translucent then remove from heat. Mix in seasoning, pine nuts and pomegranate molasses if using. Cool to room temperature then refrigerate until thoroughly chilled.

Prepare kibbeh. In a small bowl combine bulgur with a cup of water, cover and set aside for 20 minutes. Transfer into your electric mixer's bowl with the salt, seasoning and red pepper paste if using. Mix with the paddle attachment to combine. Turn up the speed and keep mixing, as you add the remaining 1/4-cup water until it just starts to stick together. Mix in semolina. With the motor running, add triple-processed kibbeh meat (habra) in increments and mix until a smooth non-sticky malleable mass is obtained remember to set aside 4 tablespoon habra for use during assembly. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

When deciding what size pan to use, go for a 14" round pan to make a thin layered kibbeh. For a slightly thicker kibbeh, about 3/4"-to-just under 1-inch, use a 12" round pan and use only about three-fourth of your prepared filling. In either case use a pan with a depth of at least 2-inches to avoid oil splatter.

In a small, bowl combine 3 tablespoons sunflower oil with 3 tablespoons clarified butter. Generously smear the bottom and sides of your pan with half this mixture.

Remove kibbeh dough from refrigerator and divide into two equal parts or into 1/3 and 2/3 parts to be used as bottom and top. Have ready a small bowl of iced water.

Assemble dish. With slightly dampened hands press kibbeh onto prepared pan to form a uniform piece, using circular motions to smooth top. Take about two tablespoons habra (kibbeh meat) and smear over the first layer. Scatter filling evenly on top, leaving a 1/4-to-1/2-inch border, and press around the diameter using your index finger. Cover with a piece of parchment paper and gently press to flatten all; remove parchment. Transfer remaining kibbeh onto a slightly dampened piece of acetate sheet, and using the palm of your hand, press down and flatten to a circle the size of your pan. Take another two tablespoons habra and smear over this layer. Use the acetate sheet to help you position and invert the second kibbeh layer over filling and edges. Place a smooth-bottomed plate on top and press to flatten kibbeh. Slowly remove acetate and smooth top once more using circular motions. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, preheat oven 350F-to-385F for a conventional oven, or 350F for convection.

Cut kibbeh. Using a thin long knife dipped in cold water, run around the diameter edges to clearly mark a border. Create two lines down the center of the pan, one vertically and another horizontally, dividing the circle into quarters and creating four wedges - cut about three-fourths the way down, making sure not reach the bottom of the pan. Score each quarter in half into wedges then score each wedge into diamonds (lozenges) or squares. Use your finger to create a small hole in the center. Then, poke each diamond using a thin knife or press down with your finger this prevents layers from bubbling and separating during baking.

If planning to freeze pan-pressed kibbeh for later use this is the time to do so. Once tightly-wrapped it will keep frozen for up to 3-to-4 months. When ready to bake, simply remove from freezer without thawing, unwrap, grease top generously, and pop into a preheated oven and bake slightly longer than instructed in the recipe.

Remove pan from refrigerator and smear top with remaining 3 tablespoons oil and butter mix.

Bake kibbeh. To bake pan-pressed kibbeh perfectly you must first know your oven. If your conventional oven bakes with both top and bottom heat simultaneously, place pan on the bottom or second to bottom rack and bake until edges begin to brown then transfer onto the top rack and continue baking until done to your likeness. If your oven has separate heating elements, place pan on the middle rack and bake with the lower heating element on until edges turn golden then switch to the upper element and continue to bake as instructed. In either case preheat oven to desired temperature first, 350F-to-385F, and bake for 30-to-60 minutes. If you have a convection setting on your oven, place pan on the second to bottom rack and bake at 350F. Remember to swirl and tip pan occasionally throughout baking time to redistribute oil and get an evenly baked kibbeh.

Here's a helpful tip for novice cooks and those unfamiliar with baked kibbeh and scared of over baking it: decorate top with a handful of blanched-peeled almonds, slightly press in to position and bake until almonds take on a light gold color this is how you know when your kibbeh is baked to perfection.

Once removed from the oven let pan sit on the counter for about eight minutes, then either lightly splatter with water or as I would do, take a tablespoon of samneh baladi and gently roll it over the top to add shine and flavor. Cover tightly with aluminum foil and set aside for 15 minutes before serving.

Pan-pressed baked kibbeh can be served warm or at room temperature. Should you decide to invert it onto a platter for a more formal presentation, let it sit for a while longer and give the pan a gentle shake before flipping it over.