

LABNEH PANCAKES WITH SOUR CHERRY COMPOTE & ZA'ATAR BUTTER

Middle Eastern Staples, American Breakfast Format

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Tangy labneh pancakes topped with a cinnamon-spiced sour cherry compote and savory za'atar compound butter. A Levantine reimaging of the classic American griddle stack.

PREP 20 MIN | COOK 25 MIN | MAKES 12 PANCAKES | SERVES 4

THE HEADNOTE

Thick, tangy labneh folded into pancake batter yields a tender crumb with subtle acidity. A glossy sour cherry compote—spiced with cinnamon in the Turkish preserve tradition and lifted with orange blossom water—pairs with za'atar compound butter for a layered sweet-savory finish. Levantine ingredients, Turkish fruit technique, American breakfast format.

If labneh, za'atar, sumac, or pomegranate molasses are new to you, see **New to These Ingredients?**, below.

INGREDIENTS

Labneh Pancakes

- **1½ cups (190 g)** all-purpose flour
- **2 tablespoons (25 g)** granulated sugar
- **2 teaspoons** baking powder
- **½ teaspoon** baking soda
- **½ teaspoon** kosher salt
- **¾ cup (180 g)** labneh, well-stirred
- **¾ cup (180 ml)** whole milk, plus more as needed
- **2** large eggs
- **3 tablespoons (45 g)** unsalted butter, melted, plus more for griddle
- **½ teaspoon** vanilla extract

Sour Cherry Compote

- **2 cups (300 g)** jarred unsweetened pitted sour cherries, well-drained (*reserve 2 Tbsp packing liquid*)
- **⅓ cup (65 g)** granulated sugar
- **1** small cinnamon stick
- **1 teaspoon** fresh lemon juice or **1 teaspoon** pomegranate molasses
- **1½ tablespoons** cornstarch mixed with **1 tablespoon** cold water
- Pinch of kosher salt
- **¼ teaspoon** orange blossom water (stir in off-heat)

Za'atar Butter

- **4 tablespoons (60 g)** unsalted butter
- **1 tablespoon** za'atar spice blend (*check salt content before adding extra salt*)
- **½ teaspoon** raw sumac
- Pinch flaky sea salt (*omit if za'atar blend is pre-salted*)

METHOD

1. MAKE THE ZA'ATAR BUTTER.

Can be done 1 week ahead. Melt **4 tablespoons butter** in a small saucepan over low heat. Add **1 tablespoon za'atar**; stir 30–60 seconds until fragrant (do not let butter brown). Remove from heat; chill 10 minutes, then mix with a fork to re-emulsify. Stir in **½ teaspoon raw sumac** and salt (if using). Shape into a log on plastic wrap, roll tightly, and refrigerate until firm. Before serving, let sit at room temperature 5 minutes to soften slightly.

2. MAKE THE SOUR CHERRY COMPOTE.

Combine drained cherries, **½ cup sugar**, cinnamon stick, **1 teaspoon lemon juice** (or pomegranate molasses), and a pinch of salt in a small saucepan over medium heat. Cook 3–4 minutes, stirring gently, until sugar dissolves and cherries are warmed through. Stir the cornstarch slurry and add to pan. Bring to a gentle simmer, stirring constantly, for 1 minute to activate thickening. Remove from heat. Discard cinnamon stick. If compote is too thick, stir in **1–2 tablespoons** reserved cherry liquid. If using, stir in **¼ teaspoon orange blossom water** now. Cover to keep warm.

3. MAKE THE PANCAKE BATTER.

Whisk **1½ cups flour**, **2 tablespoons sugar**, **2 teaspoons baking powder**, **½ teaspoon baking soda**, and **½ teaspoon salt** in a large bowl. In a separate bowl, whisk **¾ cup labneh** and **¾ cup milk** until completely smooth. Whisk in **2 eggs**, **3 tablespoons melted butter**, and **½ teaspoon vanilla**. Pour wet ingredients into dry; stir until just combined—lumps are fine. Batter will puff slightly from the labneh + baking soda reaction. If too thick to pour easily, thin with **1 tablespoon milk** at a time. Let rest 5 minutes.

4. COOK THE PANCAKES.

Heat griddle or large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Brush lightly with butter. Pour **¼ cup (60 ml) batter** per pancake onto griddle. Cook until bubbles form on surface and edges look set, 2–3 minutes. Flip and cook 1–2 minutes more until golden brown. Transfer finished pancakes to a **200°F (95°C)** oven to keep warm.

5. PLATE AND SERVE.

Stack 3 pancakes per plate. Spoon warm sour cherry compote over the top. Slice a thin round of za'atar butter and place on the hot stack so it begins to melt on contact. Drizzle lightly with olive oil or honey if desired. Serve immediately with coffee.

SERVE WITH

High-quality extra-virgin olive oil or orange blossom honey, for drizzle.

To complement the tangy, herbaceous notes of this dish without extra prep, I recommend serving it with chilled pomegranate juice for a deep, acidic punch, or apricot nectar for a softer, velvety sweetness that balances the sour cherries. If you prefer something light, a sparkling mineral water with a twist of lemon provides a clean finish to the rich labneh batter.

CHEF'S NOTES (READ BEFORE YOU COOK)

- **Labneh consistency:** Brands vary. If stiff, whisk with milk first to loosen before adding eggs.
- **Batter hydration:** The labneh + baking soda reaction aerates the mix; add milk sparingly to reach a thick-but-pourable consistency.
- **Cherry substitution:** For frozen sour cherries, increase cornstarch to **2 tablespoons** and extend initial cook time to 8–10 minutes to reduce excess liquid.
- **Za'atar blends:** Vary by region. Taste before adding salt to the butter.
- **Pomegranate molasses vs. lemon:** Pomegranate molasses adds deeper, fruitier tartness; lemon juice is brighter. Choose based on desired profile.
- **The “Reaction” Tip:** The reaction between the acidic labneh and the baking soda happens quickly; don't over-mix the batter once the wet meets the dry, or you'll lose the aeration that makes these pancakes tender.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Labneh and za'atar are breakfast staples across the Levant—the historical and culinary crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean, including modern-day Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. Traditionally served with olive oil and flatbread, I've reimagined these ingredients here within the format of an American griddle stack. This dish honors the soul of the Levantine pantry while drawing on Turkish fruit techniques (*vişne reçeli*) to create a cohesive, global breakfast experience.

MAKE-AHEAD & LEFTOVERS

- Za'atar butter keeps refrigerated 1 week or frozen 1 month.
- Compote holds refrigerated 5 days; reheat gently.

NEW TO THESE INGREDIENTS?

Labneh is yogurt strained until thick enough to spread. Tangy, creamy, and denser than Greek yogurt, it is a daily staple across the Middle East. Look for it in the dairy or international aisle—Kroger carries it alongside specialty yogurts. Middle Eastern markets stock it reliably. In a pinch, full-fat Greek yogurt works but produces a slightly less tangy result.

Za'atar is a Middle Eastern spice blend built on dried thyme, sesame seeds, and sumac. Every region and brand balances these differently, so salt levels vary. Taste yours before seasoning anything else. Z&Z Palestinian Za'atar Seasoning (2 oz) is available on Amazon. Also available in the spice aisle of well-stocked grocers and Middle Eastern markets.

Sumac is a ground dried berry with a bright, citrusy tartness—think lemon zest without the bitterness. It adds acidity without liquid. The sumac used in this recipe is Burlap & Barrel's

new-harvest Cured Sumac from their February 2026 Spice Club box. Look for sumac alongside za'atar in the spice aisle or at Middle Eastern markets.

Orange blossom water is a distilled floral extract used sparingly in Middle Eastern and North African cooking. A few drops perfume a dish; too much tastes like soap. Cortas sells a combo pack on Amazon with both Orange Blossom Water and Rose Water (10 oz each). Also available in the international aisle or at Middle Eastern markets. Sold in small bottles, it lasts indefinitely.

Pomegranate molasses is reduced pomegranate juice—thick, dark, and sweet-tart. It adds a fruity depth that straight lemon juice cannot. Cortas Pomegranate Molasses (10 oz) is available on Amazon and is a reliable choice. Middle Eastern markets carry multiple brands. Once opened, it keeps for months in the refrigerator.

Sour cherries (also labeled tart cherries or Montmorency cherries) are sharper and less sweet than the dark sweet cherries most Americans eat fresh. Jarred or frozen, they hold their shape in cooking and provide the backbone of Turkish cherry preserves. Marco Polo Pitted Sour Cherries (24 oz) are available on Amazon. Also look for them jarred in the international aisle or frozen in the fruit section.

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