



# CHEESE MATTERS

## Labneh

**Kris Lloyd**

**L**abneh is a Middle Eastern cheese made entirely from yoghurt, mainly found across the Levant in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Israel. It has a similar texture to lactic style cheeses such as chevre. It is sometimes referred to as yoghurt cheese. Most commonly rolled into balls, labneh is served with extra virgin olive oil, or used as an accompaniment with cucumbers, tomatoes, and herbs. Labneh is creamy, tangy, and versatile as both a breakfast staple and a fabulous tapas style food.

Yoghurt in any form is an important component in Levantine cuisine, eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. One famous Levantine dish is labneh mixed with crushed dry mint leaves, garlic, salt and a little sliced cucumber, similar to the popular Greek tzatziki, but considerably thicker. This can be served with pita bread as a tapas, the mint is a standout along with a fresh sweet milkiness. Labneh can be eaten as a sweet or savoury food. It is often included in Middle Eastern recipes of stuffed vegetables and served with honey and breadcrumbs as a sweet dish. It makes a healthy accompaniment to dessert, and can be slightly sweetened to sit next to a seasonal fruit tart of either cherries, rhubarb, quince or figs.

Labneh is most commonly made of cow milk, but can also be made from goat and sheep milk when in season. Labneh bil zayit (labneh in oil) is how I like to store my homemade labneh. It always looks spectacular particularly when the olive oil is a vibrant green, a contrast to

the pure white balls. I recommend preserving the labneh in this way, because it can be kept for over a year in the fridge, as it ages it turns a little sourer. This is simply done by rolling the labneh into little balls the size of a walnut and carefully filling a clean jar with the labneh balls. Add some fresh herbs of your choice, top with a good quality vintaged South Australian olive oil. Ensure the labneh is completely covered and seal the jar with a lid. Use as needed plain or rolled in herbs and spices. A favourite of mine is rolling in za'atar and serving with warm pita bread.

Most cheese making requires heat, thermometers, cultures and rennet. Labneh is a rare example of a dish made with a single ingredient and it is wonderfully easy to make. I use plain natural yoghurt, but for a more robust, almost feta-like flavour, try sheep or goat's yoghurt. There are a whole host of seasonings and variations on a simple labneh recipe, the only constants being yoghurt, some cheesecloth, string and a sieve.

**“ There are a whole host of seasonings and variations on a simple labneh recipe, the only constants being yoghurt, some cheesecloth, string and a sieve. ”**



## LABNEH RECIPE

### INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp salt

4 cups plain yogurt

Cheesecloth

Herbs of your choice: e.g. mint, oregano, sunac, olives, chilli, coriander seeds and rosemary – your imagination is the limit  
South Australian olive oil

### METHOD

Stir the salt into the yoghurt, pour into a wet cheesecloth, secure the opening together with string and hang for 24 hours at room temperature or around 48 hours in the fridge. I tie the bag on a wooden spoon handle, which sits across the top of a deep saucepan. Allow enough room under the bag so it does not sit in the whey. The collected whey can be used in cooking or added to smoothies, it has a very high nutritional value so don't throw it away! The longer you leave it hanging the firmer the labneh will be. Remove the labneh from the bag, roll it into small balls and put in a clean jar as I have described. Cover with olive oil, and herbs and spices of your choice.

Alternatively leave the drained labneh whole and very gently fold in herbs and spices being careful not to compromise the



consistency by over stirring. Add sugar or honey if you are looking for a sweet version.

No excuses, this is so simple to make and so delicious to eat. It is healthy alternative to high fat dips and you can boast that you have made it yourself. I hope I have inspired you all to give this a try and if I have I'm sure you will be hooked.

Kris Lloyd is Woodside Cheese Wrights' Head Cheesemaker  
[woodsidecheese.com.au](http://woodsidecheese.com.au)

