

# MANAKEESH BI ZA'ATAR

**S** *hahr al-khair* (the season of good) is how we Palestinians refer to the olive harvest, an exceptional and meaningful time of the year. Our relationship with the olive trees is very special, and one of the most heartwarming traditions associated with this season lies in food.

During *shahr al-khair*, Palestinians rise early to go to their olive groves and harvest the fresh olives. When our stomachs call for a delicious breakfast, fresh, hot thyme pies prepared with olive oil, *manakeesh bi-za'atar*, as we call them, are a favorite. Are you ready to give it a try? Yalla, let's go!

## Ingredients

For the dough:

- 1 kilo flour
- 1 tbsp yeast
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1½ cups warm water

For the delicious thyme/za'atar filling:

- 400 g fresh, green za'atar leaves, coarsely cut
- 3 medium-sized onions (around 375 grams), finely cut
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp salt (or to taste)
- 1 tbsp sumac (or juice of one lemon)
- Olive oil for baking

## Now the fun begins:

- 1) In a small bowl, combine water, sugar, and yeast. Set aside for 10 minutes to foam.
- 2) In a large mixing bowl, combine flour, salt, and olive oil; mix by hand.
- 3) Wash the za'atar, squeeze out the water, and pat dry.

4) Make a well in the middle of the flour mixture, pour in the yeast and water, stir until a soft dough forms.

5) Transfer to a flat, floured surface and knead for a few minutes until the dough becomes smooth.

6) Form the dough into a ball and place in a lightly oiled bowl; cover with a damp cloth, and place in a warm spot to rise until it doubles (an hour to 90 minutes).

7) Punch down the dough, knead it, and form eight balls. Arrange on a lightly floured surface, cover again, and leave to rise another 30 minutes.

8) Place the coarsely cut za'atar into a bowl with the finely cut onions, salt, sumac, and olive oil; mix.

9) Preheat the oven to 220°C. Just before you are ready to proceed, place a large baking sheet in the oven for a couple of minutes. Remove it, oil lightly, and place near you.

10) Using your fingers, spread each dough ball into a very thin disc. Fold into half and press the edges together. Cover with one eighth of the za'atar mixture and lightly pat it into the dough. Fold the round edge over the mixture and pull the edges to form a rectangle, with the za'atar mixture inside. Fold in the two ends (thirds) to make a small package; cover it, and let it rest while preparing the other packages.

11) Put some oil on your hands to spread out a package, making a large, thin square. Fold it over your hand to transfer it onto the hot, oiled baking sheet.

12) Bake for 6 to 8 minutes or until the dough is slightly browned. Turn it over and brown the other side for a couple of minutes.

13) Once the dough is baked, sprinkle a few drops of water on both sides, set aside, and cover while spreading and baking the other *manakeesh*.

14) Finally, drip a few drops of olive oil on it and spread it with your hands, lightly covering both sides.

Now you can share in the experience of a Palestinian olive harvester during *shahr al-khair*. Cut some tomatoes and cucumbers, prepare some hot tea, and soon you'll be ready for the second round of harvesting!

Amal Merrie

