

Pita, or flatbread, is the most common type of bread in the Middle East. I remember baking pita at a very young age at the Israeli scout's field trips. We made the dough on the spot, stretched it out with our hands, and baked it on top of a flat metal sheet placed on an open fire. We used these pocketless pitas (also named laffa) to scoop up chopped salad and tahini and enjoyed the leftovers bread with the local HaShahar chocolate spread.

The recipe below is for both pocket pitas and laffa (aka saj pitas, a flatbread we bake on a cast iron dome- called a saj -in our outdoor events). The difference is in the baking method. To create the pocket inside the pita, a very hot oven is needed. The heat creates a crust which prevents the moisture trapped inside the dough from being evaporated. This moisture turns into a steam that expands, creating an air bubble in the middle of the baking dough. It's cool to watch how the dough puffs up in minutes through the oven window, and there is nothing like a fresh straight from the oven pita.

See the note below for using this dough for laffa.

Pita Bread

Makes 8 pitas

Ingredients

4 1/3 cups (550 gr) unbleached all-purpose or bread flour

2 1/4 teaspoons (8 gr) instant dry yeast

20 gr (1 1/2 Tablespoons) sugar

1 1/2 cup (335 gr) water, at room temperature

1 Tablespoon (15 gr) kosher fine salt

Preparation

- Combine all ingredients in a mixer bowl with the dough hook attachment. Mix until the dough starts to clump together. Stop the mixer and scrap in any dry bits that remained on the bottom and sides of the bowl and mix until dough became loose and slightly sticky.

- Flour the top of the dough and cover the bowl with clean kitchen towel loosely with plastic wrap. Let the dough rise for about 30 -40 mins, or until dough volume increase in about 50%. If you are planning to bake the day after – cover and keep in the fridge for the night.
- Place heavy baking sheet (or pizza stone) upside down in the middle of the oven and set to highest heat - 500-525 °F.
- Divide dough into 8 pieces rolling each into a ball. Cover and allow to sit for 10 minutes (don't skip that part: the dough would develop lightness and it will be much easier to roll and shape it).
- On a floured surface press each ball down and start to shape into a disk, finish by using a rolling pin to 6" in diameter and 1/4-inch-thick disks.
- Open the oven and quickly (you don't want to lose heat) slide off the disks onto the hot upside-down tray (or the stone). Bake for 2-3 minutes or until disks are puffed and pale brown on top.
- Remove from the oven and wrap in a kitchen towel for 5 minutes before transferring to a plastic bag (to lock in the moisture) or serve immediately.

Notes

If you are baking laffa (flatbread, pocketless pitas), divide the dough into 8 balls (same as for the pita pocket), let it rest for 10 minutes and then roll it into round or oval disks, about 12" in diameter- almost double the size of the pita pocket. Bake the same way in a very hot oven for 4-5 mins. until lightly browned. If you're baking outdoor on an open fire, make sure to develop enough heat ahead of time, and grease the cast iron dome (or a flat metal sheet) before placing the dough.