

We, the Israeli, simply crazy about burekas - a puff pastry filled with savory stuffing. Stroll down the open-air markets in Tel Aviv or Ramla, and you'll immediately spot stalls selling these flaky pastries, serving them along grated tomatoes, hard-boiled eggs, olives, and pickles.

There were times when the reputation of burekas was badly damaged. Back in the '70s and '80s, a commercial version of burekas was occasionally served in small social gatherings when there was a need to feed a crowd on a low budget. During these years, a genre of Israeli-made movies that portrayed ethnic stereotypes and were considered very shallow were nicknamed "burekas films."

There is little to no similarity between these low-quality supermarket burekas to the ones that are sold today at the open-air markets. These at the markets are artfully made with homemade dough, layers upon layers of butter are folded into this dough to create a flaky, rich pastry. The process is labor-intensive (we used this technique for the burekas we sold in farmers markets over the summer and at our brunch club), which is why we recommend using a store-bought pastry for this recipe. Just look out for high quality ones made with butter and not vegetable oil or margarine.

Cheese Burekas

Makes 18 burekas

Ingredients

- 1 pound (455gr) store-bought puff pastry. Thaw it the refrigerator, and keep it there, chilled, until you are ready the work with it.
- 100 gr sour cream
- 120 gr crumbled feta cheese
- 200 gr cream cheese
- 2 large eggs (1 for the filling, 1 for the egg wash).
- 30 gr flour
- Sesame, nigella seeds or poppy seeds for topping (optional)

Preparation

- In a mixing bowl, combine the cheeses, flour and 1 egg. Break up any large crumbles of feta with the fork and mix until well combined.

- Unfold your puff pastry and roll it into a thinner sheet. If dough is dry and resist the rolling, brush it with some oil or melted butter.
- Divide the pastry into equal 4" squares.
- Whisk the remaining egg in a small bowl with 1 teaspoon of water, and brush over two adjacent edges of each square. Keep the remaining egg wash for later.
- Place about 2 tablespoons of the cheese filling in the center of each square.
- Lift the non-egg-washed sides and fold it over to meet the other egg-washed side. Do not press the edges together to seal, instead use your fingers to press down about 1/8" in/away from the edges (that will allow the edges to puff when baked).
- Place the burekas on a parchment paper-lined sheet, leaving some space between them to allow all sides to brown.
- Brush each pastry with the remaining egg wash and sprinkle generously with seeds.
- Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 20 mins and up to 24 hrs.
- Preheat oven to 400°F.
- Bake until burekas are puffed and golden brown and cook thoroughly - about 30-35 minutes.
- Serve warm with a hard-boiled egg and fresh cut vegetables.

Notes

- Puff pastry become sticky when it is warm, and it is almost impossible to work with it. Work fast or chill to firm during preparation.
- You can prepare all 18 burekas, bake half of them and freeze the rest. Defrost it in the fridge and bake some other time.