

LABNEH by Selene Colfox

Labneh is yogurt with much of the whey removed, more solid than “Greek-Style Yogurt.”

History

No one really knows when it was invented or discovered, it probably emerged in multiple places and times. This preparation is based on that of the Levant, the lands of the eastern Mediterranean; Lebanon, Syria, Israel. The word Labneh is from the Arabic, “laban” meaning white or milk.

Pliny on Yogurt: "It is a remarkable circumstance, that the barbarous nations which subsist on milk have been for so many ages either ignorant of the merits of cheese, or else have totally disregarded it; and yet they understand how to thicken milk and form therefrom an acrid kind of milk with a pleasant flavor, as well as a rich butter". The Natural History of Pliny, tr. John Bostock, Henry Thomas Riley, London: Bell, 1856–93, Volume 3 (book 11, section 239), p. 84: Originally published starting in 77 A.D.

https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Natural_History_of_Pliny/A0EMAAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA84&printsec=frontcover

Yogurt appears in Arabic cookery-books throughout SCA time period. Specific preparations are rare, but here is a similar one. I’m not doing this outside of a refrigerator, on account of the long term fermentation inside of a pumpkin shell.

“There are several varieties of this, but all follow the same recipe, only differing in ingredients. First, take a large, dry pumpkin-shell...put in 5 ratls* of sour milk, 10 ratls of fresh milk, and 1 1/2 ratls of fine-brayed salt, and stir. Cover, and leave for some days in the hot sun. This is first made in June, at the beginning of the mid-summer. Each morning add 3 ratls of fresh milk, and stir morning and evening. Add milk as the liquid lessens, until the beginning of August...cover until the beginning of October: then remove from the sun until set, and serve.” ~ from Kitab-al Tabikh (The Book of Dishes), 10th century; Charles Perry, trans.

Here are the specifics for this batch

Ingredients

1 gallon **skim milk**
1/4 cup **yogurt**, as culture

Procedure

Combine the milk and yogurt, mix thoroughly with as few lumps of yogurt as possible, to get the culture distributed well.

Set Instant Pot to “Yogurt” setting, about 16 hours at 38 degrees Celsius.

At this point, it was well cultured. The curd was visibly separating from the whey.

Poured into a muslin-lined strainer for 8 hours. Then hung up over the sink for three days.

Presentation information

Presented in its wrapping, opened for the judges. (specific for this event, serving it in a nice bowl is also good)

Served with plain bread.

Garnish the labneh with a drizzle of oil, za'atar or other seedy spices.