

## Whatcha Cookin'? – By Amy Shan

Which mouthwatering dessert is compiled of phyllo dough, nuts, and honey? البقلاوة! Baklava! The origins of this popular dish cannot be traced back to a certain country, but most people believe that it came from the Assyrians around 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Baklava is most common in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions. Long ago, only the wealthy could enjoy baklava. Today, anyone around the world can make it, and many countries have added baklava to their culinary palettes, contributing their own variations in the process. It traditionally has walnuts, but the Turks use pistachios. Some other variations include sugar syrup instead of honey, almonds, pine nuts, and pecans. Baklava is a “special occasion” food, like a pie is for us.

Phyllo dough, similar to strudel dough, is the paper-thin dough that is used in baklava. It was started in Istanbul when the Ottoman reigned, but its name comes from the Greeks, who made it extremely thin. The word “phyllo” means “leaf” in Greek. People back in the day made phyllo dough by hand, but you can find it in the frozen foods section of larger grocery stores, like HyVee or Walmart. Some brands include *Athens*, *Apollo*, and *Pepperidge Farms*.

This past weekend, I got to help Mona El Gayar and her mother make baklava! They bought the *Athens* brand of phyllo dough, which had 40 sheets and a baklava recipe on the back. The frozen dough needs to be thawed for two hours. Preparation needs about half an hour, and bake time needs 3 hours to achieve the crispy, flaky effect of the phyllo.

Here is Mona’s family baklava recipe:

### Ingredients:

180g butter  
1 packet of phyllo dough  
1 cup (actual mug, not the measuring cup) walnuts  
1 tsp cinnamon  
1 tbsp sugar

### Syrup Ingredients:

3 cups sugar  
1 cup water  
¼ tsp lemon salt (or lemon juice or zest)

Oven temperature: 250 degrees Fahrenheit

Bake time: about 3 hours (Don’t open the oven before 2 hours, otherwise heat will be released and the little “domes” will collapse. It is best not to open the oven at all, just use the little oven light.)

### Directions:

1. Rub pan with butter
2. Make sure phyllo dough is the size of the pan. Keep it covered with a slightly damp towel while working to prevent it from drying out.
3. Break the walnuts into small pieces, add sugar and cinnamon.
4. Melt butter in a pan.
5. In the pan, lay 20 sheets of phyllo, then the walnuts, and then the other 20 sheets.

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6. Cut into small, rhombus shaped pieces, so each individual piece will rise and form a “dome.”  
(This is the most difficult part; you may want someone to hold down the dough while you cut.)
7. Pour in the butter.
8. Place in a cold oven, and then set the heat to 250 degrees.

Now make the syrup

1. Bring the sugar, water, and lemon salt to a boil. Then cool in the refrigerator.
2. When the baklava is done baking, pour the cold syrup over the hot baklava.
3. Enjoy!

