



# Ma'amoul Date-Filled Cookies

Serves 12-16

For Syrian refugee Mayada Anjari and many other Muslims, these buttery, shortbread-like cookies filled with dates mean Ramadan. When she makes *ma'amoul* for Ramadan, in the generous spirit of the month, Mayada makes huge quantities at a time to have enough to share with family, friends, and neighbors.

The dough incorporates *mahlab*, a strongly flavored spice that's commonly used in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean baking. Mahlab is made from ground wild cherry pits and has a distinct flavor reminiscent of marzipan, almond, and cherry. You should be able to find it along with *ma'amoul* molds in Middle Eastern stores or online. Store any leftover cookies in a sealed container.

From "The Bread and Salt Between Us" by Mayada Anjari with Jennifer Sit, Lake Isle Press, 2018

## INGREDIENTS

1 pound dates, pitted  
1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened  
1 1/2 cups plus 1 tablespoon granulated sugar  
1 tablespoon active dry yeast  
1/4 cup warm water  
1 cup hot water  
6 1/4 cups all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon vanilla powder or 1 tablespoon  
vanilla extract  
1 1/2 teaspoons crushed mahlab  
Pinch of salt  
1 1/4 cups ghee, melted and cooled

## PREPARATION

1. In a food processor, process the dates until a smooth paste forms (Myada uses a meat grinder). Add the butter and process until just combined. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl, combine 1 tablespoon of the granulated sugar and the yeast. Pour in the warm water and let stand for 10 minutes. Combine the hot water and the remaining 1 1/2 cups sugar in a large bowl. Stir until the sugar dissolves. Let cool.
3. In a separate large bowl combine the flour, baking powder, vanilla, mahlab, and salt. Mix until well combined. Add the ghee and sugar water. Stir with a wooden spoon (or in a standing mixer) until the dough starts to come together. Use your hands to knead the dough together, folding it and punching down, until combined. Add the dissolved yeast. Use your hands to fold the dough repeatedly, kneading until the dough is completely combined and smooth. Cover the bowl and set aside.
4. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Roll 1/4 cup of dough between your hands. Use your index finger to shape the dough into a cone shape. Place a date filling ball, about 1/2 inch in diameter, inside. Pinch the hole closed and roll into a smooth ball with no cracks. Press into a 2-inch *ma'amoul* mold. Release the cookie from the mold and place on a rimmed baking sheet with the pattern up. Repeat with the remaining dough and filling. Place the cookies about 1 inch apart.
5. Bake the *ma'amoul* for 12 to 15 minutes, until lightly browned at the bottom. Transfer to a serving platter.



Liz Clayman

### Variation: Sweet Bread

Mayada makes a very large quantity of *ma'amoul* dough and reserves some of it to make unfilled "sweet bread." The dough is rolled out and stamped with decorations before being baked like a large, flat cookie.

On a lightly floured work surface, use a rolling pin to roll disks of dough that are 1/3 inch thick and 5 inches wide. (Alternatively, you can use a bowl as a guide to cut out circles for a more exact shape; knead the scraps together again and roll to make more sweet breads or use for more *ma'amoul*.) Use a fork and a *ma'amoul* mold to create a decorative pattern on top. Place on rimmed baking sheets, 1 inch apart. Bake at 400°F for 8 to 10 minutes, until lightly browned on the top.



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