

BAKLAVA

SERVES 6–8

280 g (10 oz) clarified butter, melted, or 350 g (12½ oz) unsalted butter
2 egg whites
400 g (14 oz) pistachio meal
1 tablespoon natural almond extract
8 cloves

Filo pastry

550 g (1 lb 3 oz) plain (all-purpose) flour
1 egg
1 tablespoon white vinegar
1 tablespoon lemon juice
cornflour (corn starch), for dusting

Syrup

200 g (7 oz) muscovado sugar
60 ml (¼ cup) honey
1 teaspoon rosewater

To prepare the filo pastry, place the flour in a large bowl with the egg, vinegar and lemon juice. Add 175 ml (6 fl oz) of room temperature water and mix until smooth.

Turn the dough out onto a work surface lightly dusted with cornflour and knead with the palms of your hands for about 10 minutes, until smooth. Form into a ball, return to the bowl, cover with a damp tea towel and leave to rest at room temperature for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, if making your own clarified butter, melt the butter in a small saucepan over very low heat. Skim off the thin white film that appears on the surface. Continue cooking over very low heat for 10 minutes, without stirring, to remove as much of this film as possible. Pour the butter through muslin (cheesecloth) or a clean thin tea towel and collect it in a small bowl.

Divide the dough into four portions, then shape each piece into a log about 30 cm (1 ft) long and 3–4 cm (1¼–1½ in) thick. Cut each log into 10 pieces, roll into balls, then cover with a damp tea towel to keep moist.

Sprinkle a little cornflour on your work surface and rolling pin. One at a time, roll the balls of dough out as thinly as possible; you should be able to see through them. Sprinkle each sheet with a little cornflour, to prevent them sticking together, place on a plate and cover with a damp tea towel.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F).

Beat the egg whites in a clean bowl until stiff peaks form. Using a spatula, gradually fold in the pistachio meal and almond extract.

Line a 24 cm (9½ in) round baking dish with baking paper. Brush both sides of a pastry sheet with the clarified butter, then place it in the dish. Repeat with another 19 filo pastry sheets, layering them. Using a spatula, spread the pistachio meringue over the top sheet. Butter both sides of the remaining 20 sheets, and layer them on top.

Using a sharp knife, cut the baklava into 3 cm (1¼ in) diamond shapes, fully slicing through the layers. Arrange the cloves on top.

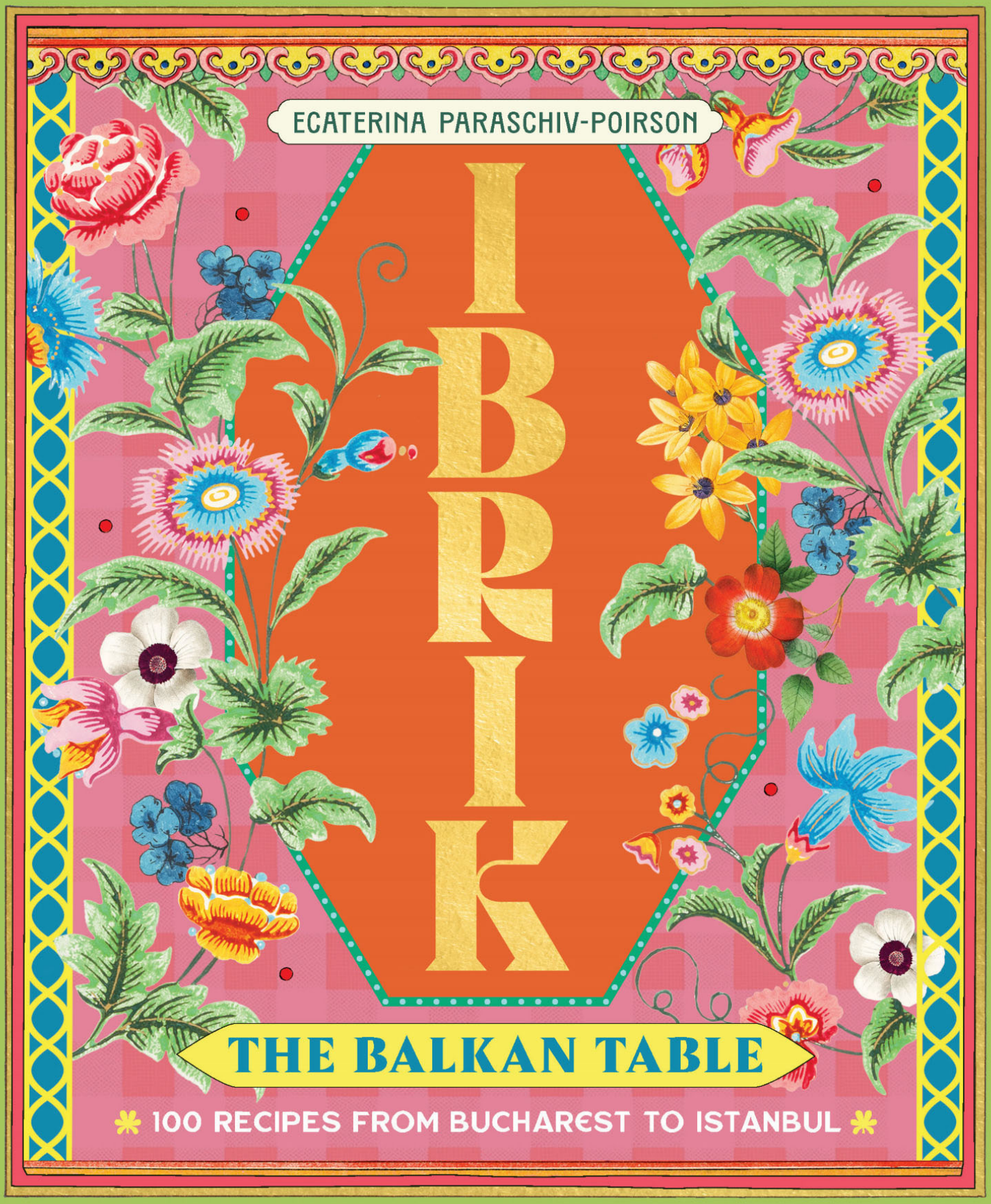
Transfer to the oven and bake for 40 minutes, or until the pastry is deep golden and crisp.

Shortly before the baklava finishes baking, place the syrup ingredients in a saucepan with 100 ml (3½ fl oz) of water. Bring to the boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook, stirring, for about 2 minutes, until a smooth syrup.

Evenly pour the syrup over the baked baklava. Allow to cool completely before serving.

The baklava will keep in an airtight container for up to 7 days.

Note: *Better pistachio meal means better baklava. Make your own by lighlty roasting good-quality shelled, unsalted pistachios in the oven, letting them cool completely, then chopping them in a food processor.*


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