

# Pita Bread

The pocket is steam, trapped between two thin skins, on a surface hot enough to set them before the gas escapes. Reliable on a stone or a galley skillet. Twenty pitas for a crew of ten to twelve.

Yield: **~20 pitas** (serves 10–12) Active: **40 min** Total: **3 hr** (incl. proof) Surface: **285°C** (545°F) Bake: **2–4 min**

## WHERE IT WAS BORN

The Levant & eastern Mediterranean. Charred flatbread at Shubayqa 1, Jordan dates to 14,400 yr ago — the oldest bread known, baked on hot stone before farming.

## EATEN, AUTHENTICALLY

Plate, spoon and wrapper in one — torn warm to scoop hummus, labneh, baba ghanoush; the pocket split and packed with falafel; folded round shawarma.

## HOW IT'S USED NOW

A daily bread across the Middle East and a global staple; brushed with za'atar oil for manakish, or rolled thin and pocketless as *laffa* / *saj* (below).

## INGREDIENTS

~20 PITAS AT 85G · WEIGHT & BAKER'S %

### DOUGH

Bread flour ( <i>higher protein = better puff</i> )	1000g	100%
Water, lukewarm (28–30°C)	640g	64%
Olive oil	30g	3%
Fine sea salt ( <i>after hydration</i> )	20g	2%
Sugar ( <i>feed + browning</i> )	15g	1.5%
Instant dried yeast ( <i>halve if cold-ferment</i> )	8g	0.8%

### THE RATIO — FLOUR = 100%

**Water 64% · Oil 3% · Salt 2% · Sugar 1.5% · Yeast 0.8%.** Below 60% water the pocket starves for steam; above ~68% it's too slack to roll clean. 64% is the hand-rolled sweet spot. Rescale anything from this.

Kit: baking stone/steel or heavy cast-iron skillet / plancha · scale · rolling pin · bench scraper · 2 towels (keep pitas soft) · peel if using a stone

## METHOD

- Mix.** Whisk 8g yeast + 15g sugar into 1000g flour. Add 640g warm water + 30g oil to a shaggy mass; rest 15 min — **hold the salt.**
- Salt + knead.** Add 20g salt; knead 8–10 min to a smooth, elastic, just-tacky dough (rough windowpane).  
*64% water + developed gluten = enough steam to inflate and skins strong + stretchy enough to hold it into one balloon. — McGee / Modernist Bread*
- Bulk ferment.** Covered, 60–90 min at 20–24°C until doubled. (*Make-ahead: halve yeast, cold-ferment 24–72 hr.*)
- Divide + rest.** Scale ~20 × 85g balls. Rest covered 20–30 min. Preheat the surface to max now (stone: 45 min).  
*Balling tightens gluten; the rest lets it relax + re-align so it rolls even and won't spring back. Even rolling is the #1 predictor of a clean pocket. — Reinhart / López-Alt*
- Roll + 2nd rest.** Roll each to ~18 cm, 4–5 mm even, turning a quarter per stroke. Rest the rounds 10 min, covered. Brush off loose flour.

### Bake — two routes, 285°C surface

- Stone/steel (oven):** 275–290°C, top third. Slide a round on → balloons in 2–3 min. Pull puffed + barely coloured.
- Skillet/plancha (galley):** dry, max heat, water skitters instantly. Round down ~30 sec → flip → balloons 1–2 min. Press stubborn spots with a folded towel.
- The skins must set faster than the steam leaks — only happens above ~230°C. Cast iron holds that heat, which is why the skillet works at sea. — McGee / Modernist

**Done:** Fully ballooned into a dome (the pocket is the cue), set + dry, a few pale-gold blisters — not browned hard.

**Keep soft:** stack straight into a towel-lined bowl off the heat — trapped steam keeps them foldable. Pull at the dome, never at colour.

### ONE DOUGH, TWO DISHES — LAFFA & SAJ

The same dough rolled thin makes the Levant's pocketless wraps. Skip the careful even round: roll a ball to **~2 mm**, ~28 cm, and bake on a **domed plancha** (saj) or slap it onto a clay-oven wall (laffa). No pocket — a soft, pliable sheet for shawarma, falafel and dips. *Brush with za'atar oil for manakish.*

## ELEVATION

### TIER 1 — NO EXTRA TIME

- 20% whole wheat** — swap 200g flour, +20g water
- Nigella / sesame** — pressed into the round
- Za'atar-oil brush** — manakish-style finish

### TIER 2 — WORTH IT (+15 MIN)

- Cold overnight ferment** — halve yeast, 24–72 hr fridge
- Milk + yogurt** — replace 150g water with yogurt
- Garlic-herb oil** — brushed warm on exit

### TIER 3 — RESTAURANT

- Sourdough levain** — 200g levain, water ~100g
- Laffa / saj** — 28cm, ~2mm, on a domed plancha
- 80/20 bread + 00** — strength + stretch

## TROUBLESHOOT

<b>No pocket / flat</b>	Surface not hot enough. Preheat longer; water must skitter instantly.
<b>Uneven / blows a hole</b>	Rolled uneven. 4–5 mm uniform, turn a quarter each stroke.
<b>Springs back rolling</b>	Gluten too tight. Rest balls 20–30 min, rounds 10 min more.
<b>Tough, leathery</b>	Overbaked / too dry. Pull at the dome; hold 64%; stack under towel.
<b>Cracks when folded</b>	Baked too long. Shorter bake; keep covered to steam-soften.
<b>Acrid taste</b>	Burnt bench flour. Brush rounds; wipe surface between bakes.

## CHARTER PREP & STORAGE

<b>Best route</b>	<b>Cold-ferment the dough; bake fresh on a hot skillet mid-charter — no deck oven.</b>
<b>Dough</b>	3 d fridge, halved yeast, covered. Warm before rolling.
<b>Divided balls</b>	1 d fridge, oiled tray. Room temp before rolling.
<b>Baked</b>	2 d airtight RT. Re-warm in foil or a hot pan.
<b>Frozen</b>	2 mo, parchment between. Toast / pan-warm from frozen.
<b>Never</b>	Refrigerate baked pita — stales fast, goes leathery.