



Taking Sides

WARM AND COOL ELEMENTS MAKE A DELICIOUS FUSION THAT'S PERFECT FOR YOUR MEZZE OR AS A SIDE

FRESH TOMATOES AND HERBS are in abundance this time of year. With flavors at their peak, my focus is on simple dishes with herbs and seasonings that highlight the natural flavors of fresh ingredients. This recipe is inspired by Israeli-born British Chef Yotam Ottolenghi whose culinary style is rooted in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean traditions. Both regions use wholesome, fresh ingredients that are delicious and beneficial to good health.

In this dish, sweet cherry tomatoes are seasoned with lemon, garlic, oregano, olive oil, and pepper flakes. The mixture is charred then served on a bed of cool creamy seasoned labneh. This combination creates a flavor sensation that is sweet and tart and hot and cool all at once. It's wonderful, served with toasted sourdough. It can be used as a side or an appetizer.

Here, I have used Aleppo pepper flakes that have a smokey flavor with a mild heat. You can also try Urfa chili flakes. They have a deep smoky, almost chocolatey flavor rather than heat. They are sometimes hard to find in our local markets but are worth the hunt.

Labneh can be substituted with thick Greek yogurt. However, if you've never had labneh, I highly recommend you try it, it can be found at most ethnic food markets. 



Warm Charred Tomatoes with Labneh



INGREDIENTS:

16 oz. cherry tomatoes
3 tbsp olive oil +1 tbsp. more for the labneh
¾ tsp. cumin seeds
½ tsp. light brown sugar
3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
3 thyme sprigs
6 oregano sprigs: 3 sprigs left whole, the rest stemmed, to serve
1 lemon: using a peeler, finely peel three strips of outer skin, then zest the remaining skin
Flaked sea salt and black pepper
2 cups labneh or extra-thick Greek-style yogurt, cold
1 tsp. Aleppo chili flakes (or ½ tsp other crushed red pepper flakes)
Multigrain or sourdough bread for serving.

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Place the tomatoes in a mixing bowl with the olive oil, cumin, sugar, garlic, thyme, oregano sprigs, lemon strips, ½ tsp of flaked salt, and freshly ground pepper. Mix to combine, then transfer to a baking sheet just large enough to fit all the tomatoes together snugly. Place the sheet about 2-4 inches beneath the broiler. First, roast for 20 minutes, until the tomatoes are beginning to blister and the liquid is bubbling. Then, turn the oven to the broil setting for 4-6 minutes, until the tomatoes start to blacken on top.

While the tomatoes are roasting, combine the labneh with 1 tbsp. olive oil, the grated lemon zest, and ¼ tsp of flaked salt. Keep in the fridge until ready to serve.

Once the tomatoes are ready, spread the chilled labneh on a platter creating a dip in it with the back of a spoon. Spoon the hot tomatoes on top, along with their juices, lemon strips, garlic, and herbs, and finish with the oregano leaves and chile flakes. Serve at once.

Pro Tip

Aleppo pepper is a Syrian pepper flake that is bright red and has a moderate amount of heat. Urfa flakes are from a Turkish pepper that is darker red and has deeper, smokier flavor and less heat.

Culinary Notes

Try this recipe with any of your favorite vegetables in place of the tomatoes. It's delicious with roasted eggplant, shallots, or zucchini.



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