

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 <i>laffa</i> / <i>saj</i> (below).
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INGREDIENTS

WEIGHT (LB/OZ) · CUPS / VOLUME IN RIGHT COLUMN

DOUGH

Bread flour (<i>higher protein = better puff</i>)	2 lb 3.3 oz	8 cups
Water, lukewarm (28–30°C)	1 lb 6.6 oz	2½ cups
Olive oil	1.1 oz	2¼ tbsp
Fine sea salt (<i>after hydration</i>)	0.71 oz	1⅞ tbsp
Sugar (<i>feed + browning</i>)	0.53 oz	1¼ tbsp
Instant dried yeast (<i>halve if cold-ferment</i>)	0.28 oz	2½ tsp

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

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

CHARTER PREP & STORAGE

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