

Alcalay Family Bulgarian Burekas (Eggplant and Feta Puff Pastry)

Makes: about 18 Burekas/per batch

This absolutely delicious savory filled puff pastry recipe was passed down from generation to generation in the Alcalay family (and in many Eastern European families!). Family lore goes... The Alcalay's were Sephardic Jews originally from Spain, but fled to Bulgaria during the Spanish Inquisition taking all of their recipes and culture with them. Sephardic Jews from Turkey during the Ottoman Empire were introduced to the popular "Asian dumpling". This evolved throughout the Balkans into a more puff pastry (and sometimes filo dough) version merging it with their version of the same dish (*empanada*) and adapting it to make it kosher. **Börek + empanada = bureka**. And there you go!

Serve as an appetizer, with soup, salad or a snack. You might want to double or triple this recipe, because you can't eat just one!!

Preheat oven to 350 degrees – Must be at 350 before you put them in the oven.

Ingredients: Cheese Filling

- 1 ½ cups Cottage Cheese
- 1 cup crumbled Bulgarian or Israeli Feta (milder, less salty than Greek)
- 1 tsp. breadcrumbs
- 1 egg yolk (save egg white in separate bowl)

In a mixing bowl, combine cottage cheese, feta, breadcrumbs and egg yolk. Use a fork to mix ingredients together until well blended. Make sure to break up any large crumbles of feta with the fork. Refrigerate mixture until you are ready to assemble the bureka.

Ingredients: Eggplant Filling

- 1 large purple eggplant, roasted, without seeds and chopped finely (like mash potatoes)
- 1 egg yolk (save egg white in separate bowl)
- Pinch of salt

Place eggplant on an aluminum foil lined baking sheet. Bake at 400 for 20 - 30 minutes until soft in the middle (if you have a convection oven, Broil for 20 minutes). Once cool enough to touch, make 2 parallel cuts lengthwise along the eggplant and opening it up (like an envelope pocket). Gently remove all of the seeds and then skin. Chop eggplant into a "mash potato" consistency with a large knife on a cutting board. If eggplant mash is very moist, heat in a sauté pan with a teaspoon of olive oil for a few minutes until the water evaporates. Allow to cool, then add the egg yolk and mix together. Refrigerate mixture until you are ready to assemble the bureka.

Puff Pastry Ingredients/Preparations:

- 2 sheets of puff pastry (cut into 4 x 4-inch squares) OR 4 x 4 precut package
- Parchment paper
- 2 Large baking sheets
- 1/2 cup raw sesame seeds
- Egg whites

Making the Burekas: (same instructions for cheese or eggplant)

Step 1: On a smooth, clean, lightly floured surface, unfold one of your puff pastry sheets. Use a rolling pin to roll out the sheet to a 12x12 inch square. If using homemade puff pastry, roll your dough out to the same size - a 12"x12" square. Cut the sheet of puff pastry dough into 9 equal-sized squares, each about 4"x4" large. If you purchase the 4 x 4 square sheets already, just remove the paper and they are ready for the next step!

Step 2: Place 2 teaspoons of the filling (cheese OR eggplant) in the center of each dough square.

Step 3: Fold the dough squares in half on the diagonal, making a triangle.

Step 4: Using your thumb, press down firmly, and continue to press down the outer open edge of the triangle to seal. You can also crimp the edges with the tines of a fork if you're having sealing issues. Make sure the edges are sure sealed, so the filling doesn't spill out when baking.

Step 5: Place your finished bureka on a parchment lined baking sheet, and repeat steps 2, 3, and 4 until the baking sheet is covered. Make sure to give at least an inch between them, so they don't stick together while baking.

Step 6: In a small bowl, whisk together the egg whites and 2 tsp of cool water. Use a pastry brush to brush a light layer of the egg wash on the surface of each boureka.

Step 7: Sprinkle the burekas with sesame seeds.

Step 8: Bake the burekas for about 15 to 20 minutes until light golden brown.

Serve warm or store in a sealed container or plastic Ziplock bag.

To freeze burekas:

Prepare, fill, and seal the pastries. Do not coat with egg wash or bake. Place the unbaked pastries in an airtight container that's freezer safe (like Tupperware or Ziplock freezer bag) in single layers, separating each layer of burekas with a piece of parchment paper or wax paper to keep them from freezing together.

When ready to bake, take the burekas out of the freezer (no need to defrost) and arrange them on a baking sheet on parchment paper. Coat with thin layer of egg wash then sesame seeds.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes till golden brown.

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