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Banitza - Improved “Dupnishka” Recipe

All Bulgarian ladies know how to make good Banitza – layered egg and cheese cake with Fillo pastry – but this recipe is something special. It has been gradually improved over the ten years that I have been living in San Diego, with tips and bits of advice from friends, their mothers, grandmothers, visiting relatives and a few telephone calls from Bulgaria. The recipe has almost reached perfection! The last critical, essential, absolutely! necessary tip was added by a guest on our August 2009 Literary Krajec meeting. It comes from the region of Dupnica, hence the name “**Improved Dupnishka Recipe**”. Our Krajec tried it in September and everyone agrees: it is absolutely delicious. My American friends from the coffee klatch like it too and helped me write down the recipe. Thank you, Michelle.

To make it a success, please follow the recipe in all the minute details.
Enjoy!

Ingredients:

5 eggs – Take them out of the fridge a few hours earlier, so that they are at room temperature.
In a large bowl, beat the eggs well until frothy. Separate the mixture, approximately **two**
0 eggs
for
the cheese filling
,
three eggs
for the
milk topping.

Frozen Fillo pastry - One 16 oz. box. I buy those from the Persian shop on Genesee. I buy the “**Apollo Fillo**” #4 Pastry sheets, but any other kind will do. They are approx. 28 – 12”x17” Fillo sheets that keep in the freezer forever. Defrost them in the box on the kitchen counter for a few hours.

Melted butter - **¾ stick.** Melt the butter in a small pan over the stove (do not microwave) until it sizzles and gets golden / brown crumbles. This gives the banitza a nice flavor.

Bulgarian Feta cheese - approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ pound or a little more. Again, I buy it from the Persian store. You can get it in a box, or over the counter, slightly cheaper and sometimes better quality. Crumble the cheese well with a fork on a plate.

Plain yogurt - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup

Baking soda - $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon

In a bigger bowl mix the yogurt with the baking soda. The soda will make it bubble and rise a bit. Add the crumbled cheese. Add the two beaten eggs. This makes **the cheese filling**.

Grapeseed oil – ½ cup. You can use light Canola oil instead, but NOT Olive Oil because it is too heavy.

Milk – 1 cup. Warm it up in the microwave, but be careful not to make it too hot, then add it to the remaining three beaten eggs. This makes **the milk topping**. Prepare the milk topping at the end after your banitzza is in the pan, cut in rectangles so that it is warm when you pour it over.

Preparation:

Using 2- 3 spoonfuls from the Grapeseed oil, lightly cover the bottom and sides of a metal 9" x 13" pan. I have discovered that this small size pan works best for my oven, as it allows the temperature to raise the whole cake. If I use a bigger pan, the middle does not bake well.

Now you are ready to start putting together the banitzza: Have the oiled metal pan next to the opened box with Fillo pastry; get the bowl with **the cheese filling** and the small pan with the melted butter nearby.

Lay Fillo sheets, starting with three sheets on the bottom of pan. Crinkle them with your fingers as they are slightly larger than the pan. Try to spread the folds evenly. With a spoon spread some of the cheese mixture in small heaps here and there. Sprinkle a little of the hot butter here and there, with love. Repeat layering of the Fillo sheets, **cheese filling**, and butter. Make sure you have enough of **the cheese filling** and butter to finish the whole box of the Fillo pastry. End with two or three Fillo sheets as the top layer. Do not crinkle the very last one, cut the edges for a smooth appearance.

Half way through the layering, remember to switch on the oven: 400 F (or 200 C).

With a sharp knife cut the banitzza into rectangles.

On the stove, in a small pan heat real hot, until sizzling, the remaining of grapeseed oil. Carefully pour it along the edges of the pan and over the edges of the rectangles. They will sizzle and become golden which will make you feel good.

Get the warm **milk topping** and evenly pour it on top of the banitzza.

By now your oven should be ready, put the banitzza in. I use the fan, for speed baking.

Baking and cooling:

Bake the banitzza initially at 400 degrees (200 C) for 10-15 minutes until it raises, but does not get cooked on top. Keep an eye on it, gradually lower the temperature to 300 (150 C) degrees for the remaining 45 minutes. The banitzza needs to cook for an hour, for the most part at a lower temperature while well raised from the initial heat.

Once out of the oven, turn it upside down, propping the pan on four cups hanging upside down. I do it over the sink. This is important, as it prevents the banitzza from sagging in the middle.

Serve with a glass of red wine or some yogurt.

Nazdrave!