

Arabic Cream-Filled Pastries (Warbat bil Ashta)

(Yield: About 24 pastries)

Cream Filling (Ashta) (see below)

Sugar Syrup (see below)

1 lb phyllo dough (13 by 13-inch sheets)

1/2 c ghee (clarified butter), melted (plus a little more to brush on top if necessary)

2 TB pistachios, very finely chopped (for garnish)

Cream Filling (Ashta) (Yields about 2 c) (Adopted slightly from Taste of Beirut):

2 c milk

2 oz (about 2 slices) American-style white bread, crusts removed and cubed

3 TB cornstarch

1 tsp rose water

1 tsp orange blossom water

Sugar Syrup:

3/4 c sugar

3/4 c water

1/2 tsp rose water

1/2 tsp orange blossom water

1/2 tsp lemon juice

Baking sheets

Silpat liners or parchment paper

Pastry brush



For the Cream Filling

In a medium-sized saucepan, combine the bread and 1 c milk, making sure that the bread is completely immersed in the milk. Transfer the saucepan to the fridge so the bread can soak for 30 minutes (or up to 12 hours). After the bread has soaked, in a separate bowl, stir together the cornstarch with the remaining cup of milk. Cook the soaked bread/milk mixture on medium heat until it simmers (stirring frequently with a whisk). Whisk in the cornstarch slurry, bring the mixture up to a boil, then boil for 1 minute. Turn off the heat and add the rose water and orange blossom water. Cool to room temperature, then refrigerate until chilled to let the cream fully thicken.

For the Sugar Syrup

Combine the sugar and water in a small saucepan over medium heat; bring it up to a boil, then turn the heat down and let it simmer until thickened slightly (about 15 minutes), stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and stir in the rose water, orange blossom water, and lemon juice; set aside to cool.

To Make the Pastries

If you're using frozen phyllo dough, let it thaw in the fridge overnight. Preheat the oven to 350F and line your baking sheets with silpat liners or parchment paper. Have the melted ghee and pastry brush ready, along with the ashta and a tablespoon-sized measuring spoon. Unwrap the phyllo and arrange it in a stack in front of you.

Using the pastry brush, brush melted ghee on the top half of the phyllo sheet that's on the top of the stack; fold the sheet in half, bringing the unbuttered side on top of the buttered side. On the sheet that you just folded over, brush ghee across the top half of it (the long way). Fold the sheet in half again, bringing the unbuttered side on top of the buttered side. You will be left with a long, thin rectangle, about 13 inches wide and 3 1/4 inches tall.

Bake the pastries until golden and crispy, about 18-20 minutes.