

Malawach (Yemenite Jewish Pancakes)

By Lyna Vuong

When's the last time you had a flatbread that resembles a pancake and pulls apart like a croissant? That irresistible, buttery, flaky flatbread is *Malawach*. Yemenite Jews brought this traditional bread with them to Israel in the '50's, and it was commonly eaten for breakfast where it was served with a drizzle of honey or with hard boiled eggs, [grated tomato](#), and [zhug \(a Yemeni spicy herb sauce\)](#). Malawach has since crossed over into mainstream Israeli culture, you'd easily find someone enjoying this flatbread as an afternoon snack or scarfing them down after a late night of drinking. These days, Israeli restaurants from L.A. to New York offer malawach on their menus, so its increasing popularity isn't surprising. Several cultures have a flatbread similar to malawach like [Chinese scallion pancakes](#), [South Indian paratha](#), or [Moroccan m'smen](#), but each has its own methodology: scallion pancakes use oil instead of butter, paratha adds egg to the dough, and m'smen uses oil and semolina flour. Malawach is prepared without oil or eggs, just lots of butter, spread liberally, creating a laminated dough as it's folded and rolled. The addition of pastry flour in this recipe yields an unmistakable light, buttery, flaky texture to boot. Malawach is easy to make but requires a little patience and time, as most bread baking does. The beauty of this recipe though is that **once you've made the effort of making and rolling the dough, you can store the flatbread dough in the freezer for up to 1 month**; take 'em straight from the freezer to a grill pan and within 3 minutes you'll have fresh bread to devour as-is, dipped in sauce, or used as a vessel for your filling of choice. (If you're like me, hot dogs!) When I made them, I wanted the best of all worlds and experimented by adding some of my favorite mixtures *into* the dough for variety: sliced scallions, sauteed garlic, wilted greens, and everything spice; they were all delicious. For a Sunday morning brunch gathering, I grilled the malawach and served them with grated tomato and zhug, topped with poached eggs. The tomato and zhug balanced the buttery bread with a pop of freshness and the perfect amount of acidity and heat. We delighted in tearing apart flaky pieces of the warm malawach and kept going back for more dollops of sauce to enjoy with each bite. A friend from Tel Aviv recently told me that when she first came to the states, scallion pancakes from Chinese restaurants were her favorite because they reminded her of malawach back home! Whether you like malawach, scallion pancakes, or paratha, this is a great flaky flatbread recipe to have on hand; the buttery, pull-apart texture is something I quickly became obsessed with. Enjoy them for breakfast the traditional Yemeni Jewish way (I love mine topped with poached eggs). Modify this malawach recipe with your favorite spices and fillings for a modern spin.

Makes 8 (8-inch) pancakes

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
 - 1 cup pastry flour
 - 1/4 cup granulated sugar
 - 1 tablespoon kosher salt
 - 1 cup warm water
 - 4 ounces unsalted butter, room temperature
1. In a large bowl, whisk together the flours, sugar, and salt.
 2. Slowly pour in the warm water, and use your hand to stir and mix the dough until it fully pulls away from the bowl. If the dough is not completely combined, stir in 1/2 tablespoon of water at a time, mixing until the dough comes together.
 3. Transfer the dough to a clean countertop and knead until it is smooth and elastic, roughly 5 minutes. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and let it rest for 30 minutes.
 4. Uncover the dough and with a knife or pastry scraper, divide the dough into 8 equal pieces; keep the dough covered with plastic wrap while you flatten each ball out.

5. Prepare a sheet tray by lining it with parchment paper and set it aside. On a clean countertop, rub 1 tablespoon of butter across the worksurface. Place one piece of dough at a time on the buttered countertop and use a rolling pin to shape the dough into roughly an 8-inch circle (you should not need to use flour to roll the dough).
6. Take 1 tablespoon of butter and use your fingers to dollop pieces of it across the surface of the dough; starting from the center, with both hands use your fingers to press and slide them across the dough, stretching it outwards, creating a large 12 x 14-inch rectangle. The dough should be thin enough to see through to the countertop, it's okay if a few tears occur.
7. If creating a filling variation (see below for suggestions), sprinkle 2 tablespoon across the surface of the buttered dough now.
8. Starting from the widest edge of the rectangle, fold over the dough in 1-inch increments until a long rope is created. Coil the rope into a pinwheel and place on the prepared sheet tray. Cover the dough with the plastic wrap previously used, and roll the remaining pieces of dough. Cover the sheet tray with plastic wrap and refrigerate the dough overnight, or until thoroughly chilled.
9. Remove the dough from the refrigerator. Use a rolling pin to flatten the pinwheels into 8 1/2-inch circles. Stack the flattened dough in between pieces of parchment paper, and place inside a freezer storage bag. Freeze the dough for a minimum of 45 minutes, and store up to 1 month.
10. To cook, lightly butter a large non-stick or cast iron pan and place over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, add a frozen piece of flattened dough to the pan and turn the stove to medium. (The pan should not be smoking.) Cook the dough 1 to 2 minutes per side until it is golden brown. The malawach is best enjoyed fresh off the pan; if you plan to serve all the flatbread, place them in an oven at 200 degrees to keep warm until ready to serve.
11. Filling variations: nigella seeds; everything spice; sauteed greens (could be leftovers, like chard, kale, or spinach); fresh chopped herbs like oregano, rosemary, or thyme; sauteed garlic or shallots; sliced scallions; sharp, hard cheese of your choice, crumbled or shredded