



LEVANTINE · MIDDLE EASTERN · MEDITERRANEAN BREAD FOUNDATION ·  
BREAD · SNACK · SANDWICH BASE · TAPAS ACCESSORY

# Pita · La Ciencia del Bolsillo

Strong bread flour + water + yeast + salt + olive oil, hand-kneaded 8 minutes, bulk-fermented 90 minutes, divided into 80 g balls, rested 30 minutes, rolled thin, and baked 2 minutes on the hottest surface in the kitchen — a 260°C cast-iron skillet or a kamado at 315°C. The pita puffs into a perfect balloon in 30 seconds as steam pressure expands inside the dough + the top crust separates cleanly from the bottom. The bubble-pocket is the dish. Pulled from heat, it collapses gently, and you've got the bread that makes hummus complete, the wrap for shawarma, and the snack that's still warm on the counter ten minutes later.

Protein None (bread)

Serves 8 pitas · ~80 g each · 15-20 portions as tapas bread · 8 servings

Difficulty Beginner-Intermediate

Active 30 min active

Total 30 min + 90 min bulk + 30 min divide rest + 8 min bake = 2 hours

## THE STORY


### Why the Pocket Happens — And How to Make Sure It Does

Every pita failure has one root cause: insufficient heat at the bake. The pocket forms because the dough hits the hot surface at 260-315°C, the water in the dough flashes to steam, the steam expands rapidly inside the dough, and the trapped steam pushes the top crust away from the bottom crust — creating the signature hollow pocket. If the cooking surface is too cool (below ~240°C), the dough just bakes through without

generating enough steam pressure to push the top crust off. You get flatbread, not pita. The difference is 20-30°C of surface temperature, and every home kitchen can solve it with: a cast-iron skillet pre-heated to max for 15 minutes, a pizza stone pre-heated similarly, or a kamado at 315°C.

The second key variable is **dough moisture**. Traditional pita dough is ~62% hydration (water weight / flour weight), which is moderate — drier than focaccia (75-80%), wetter than standard sandwich bread (55-60%). The 62% hydration gives enough water to generate steam but keeps the dough firm enough to roll thin without tearing. Higher hydration (70%+) makes rolling difficult + the pocket can fail to form (the dough is too slack to hold the steam pressure). Lower hydration (55%) produces a dense pita that still bakes through but doesn't generate a robust pocket.

The third variable is **roll thickness**. Roll the dough balls to 3-4 mm thickness + a diameter of ~15-18 cm. Thicker + the steam can't push through; thinner + the dough tears during transfer. 3-4 mm is the calibrated sweet spot.

This recipe teaches the **high-heat bread-baking archetype** — a family of breads (pita, naan, puri, lavash, tortilla de trigo, focaccia-quick-variant) that rely on extreme surface heat + rapid steam generation to produce their characteristic structure. Applies broadly: if you know how to pita, you can do naan-kamado  (already shipped), puri, lavash, dosa, and regional flatbreads across the Middle Eastern + South Asian + North African traditions. One technique, many breads.

Pita also teaches the **fermentation discipline on a short timeline**. This recipe uses commercial yeast (not sourdough) for speed — 90-minute bulk fermentation + 30-minute divide rest = 2 hours total from first mix to bake. Perfect for a Thursday evening where you want fresh bread at dinner without planning 2 days ahead. Sourdough pita (pita with a sourdough levain instead of commercial yeast) exists + works; it produces a more-complex flavor + takes 8-12 hours total. Use the commercial-yeast version for weeknights; the sourdough version for weekend dinner parties.

# Specs

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p><b>YIELD</b><br/> <b>8 pitas · ~80 g each</b></p>                    | <p><b>HYDRATION</b><br/> <b>62% (water weight / flour weight)</b></p>  | <p><b>SURFACE HEAT</b><br/> <b>260°C minimum (cast iron) · 315°C ideal (kamado) · pre-heat 15 min</b></p> | <p><b>BAKE TIME</b><br/> <b>60-90 sec per side · 2 min total · pita puffs in 30 sec</b></p> |
| <p><b>BULK FERMENT</b><br/> <b>90 min at 24°C · doubles in size</b></p> | <p><b>DIVIDE REST</b><br/> <b>30 min after shaping into balls · essential for gluten relaxation</b></p>              | <p><b>DIFFICULTY</b><br/> <b>Beginner-Intermediate</b><br/>         ●●○○○</p>                             | <p><b>ACTIVE TIME</b><br/> <b>30 min</b></p>  |
| <p><b>TOTAL TIME</b><br/> <b>~2 h 38 min</b></p>                        | <p><b>KEY RULE</b><br/> <b>Surface must be at minimum 260°C · thinner dough + hotter surface = better pocket</b></p> |   |   |

## What Changed & Why

Two variables: flour quality + cooking surface. Technique is identical across tiers. The ● Tier A (Everyday) uses King Arthur bread flour (Whole Foods / Publix; widely available) + a preheated cast-iron skillet on the gas burner at maximum heat. Produces restaurant-grade pita. The ● Tier B (No-Limits) uses freshly-milled spelt or heritage-wheat bread flour from Grist & Toll (Pasadena shipping) or local artisan miller + the kamado at 315°C. The kamado difference is large — the higher surface temp produces a more robust pocket + slightly-charred spots + a noticeable wood-fired aromatic register. If you have the kamado, use it. The flour upgrade is perceptible but smaller than the cooking surface upgrade.

| CHANGE | ORIGINAL   | UMAMI VERSION   | WHY  |
|--------|--|---|--|
| TECH   | Stand-mixer dough, 400°F oven, 5 min bake on a sheet pan | Hand-kneaded dough, 260°C cast-iron skillet preheated 15 min, 2 min bake per pita | 400°F / 204°C is the upper range of a standard home oven; it's not hot enough to drive the steam pressure that creates the pita pocket. Cast iron at max burner heat reaches 260-280°C + provides the thermal mass to maintain that temperature when a cold dough-ball hits it. The cast-iron pre-heat is essential — 15 minutes on max heat, not 5 minutes. Without proper pre-heat, even cast iron doesn't reach the temperature target. |

| CHANGE | ORIGINAL  | UMAMI VERSION  | WHY  |
|--------|---|--|--|
| TECH   | Single bulk ferment, roll directly from bulk into pitas | 90-min bulk ferment + divide into 80 g balls + 30-min divide rest BEFORE rolling | The 30-min divide rest is the step that novices skip + pay for. During this rest, the gluten matrix relaxes after being compressed into balls. Without it, the dough is still too tight to roll thin — it snaps back + can't hold the 3-4 mm thickness. With the 30-min rest, the dough rolls easily + stays thin. This is a universal bread-rolling rule, not just pita-specific.                   |
| ADD    | —   | 2 g sugar OR 5 g honey in the dough  | A small amount of sugar (or honey) feeds the yeast in the first 30 minutes of fermentation, producing a slightly-faster rise + more-complex yeast-metabolites (improves flavor). Traditional Middle Eastern pita often omits this; modern recipes include it. Either is acceptable. 2 g sugar (or 5 g honey) is a minor boost; don't go above 5 g (then it affects browning + sweetness noticeably). |
|        |   |  |  |

| CHANGE | ORIGINAL                      | UMAMI VERSION  | WHY  |
|--------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| ADD    | —                             | 15 g olive oil in the dough + additional 10 g brushed on the rolled pitas before baking                                | The in-dough olive oil (15 g per 500 g flour, ~3%) softens the final texture + adds flavor. The brush-on oil before baking promotes surface browning + adds a visible glossy sheen. Traditional Middle Eastern pita is sometimes oil-free (dry dough); this recipe splits the difference + produces a slightly-more-tender + slightly-richer pita than pure traditional. |
| ELEV   | Sheet-pan bake, one side only | Cast-iron skillet flip-bake: 60-90 sec first side, flip, 60-90 sec second side, transfer to a bread-towel-lined basket | The flip-bake is the classic Lebanese + Turkish technique. The first side gets the signature puff (pocket forms); the second side develops secondary char + flavor. Single-side bake produces a pita that's puffed + cooked through but less-interesting. Flip-bake = better flavor.   |
| SKIP   | Instant yeast in bulk         | Active dry yeast bloomed in warm water first, OR instant yeast direct (both work)                                      | Both instant yeast (mix directly with flour) + active dry (bloom in warm water first) work identically in this recipe. Use whichever is in your pantry. Traditional Middle Eastern yeast technique uses active dry + bloom; modern recipes often use instant for simplicity. Not a quality difference — just a workflow choice.  |

# What You Need

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## ● Everyday

### The Flour

- 500 g **bread flour** (high protein, ~12.5% gluten) — **King Arthur Bread Flour** (Whole Foods / Publix) is the US default. **All-purpose flour** works but produces a slightly-less-chewy pita; bread flour is the preferred choice.

### The Wet Ingredients

- 310 g **warm water** (~40°C / 104°F; warm to the touch but not hot)
- 15 g **EVOO** — California Olive Ranch Arbequina or standard quality
- 2 g (1/2 tsp) **granulated sugar** OR 5 g (1 tsp) **honey**

### The Yeast + Salt

- 7 g (2 1/4 tsp / 1 packet) **active dry yeast** (Red Star or Fleischmann's) OR 6 g instant yeast
- 10 g (2 tsp) **fine sea salt**

### For Brushing + Baking

- 10 g additional EVOO for brushing pitas before baking
- Flour for dusting rolling surface

## No Limits

### **The Flour (Tier B — perceptible but not transformative)**

- 500 g **heritage-wheat bread flour** — **Grist & Toll Red Fife** (stone-ground, Pasadena shipping) OR **Anson Mills Farro bread flour** (Old World heritage wheat, South Carolina shipping). Stone-ground heritage flour has different protein structure + more complex flavor than commodity bread flour.

### **The Wet (Tier B)**

- 310 g filtered water
- 15 g **Rincón de la Subbética Arbequina EVOO** or **Castillo de Canena Family Reserve**
- 5 g **local Miami honey** (raw; from **Berry Farms Honey** or farmers market)

### **The Yeast + Salt (Tier B)**

- 7 g active dry yeast
- 10 g **Sal de Ibiza** or **Maldon flake salt** (crushed fine)

## EQUIPMENT

### Your Kit

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- Kitchen scale (critical for hydration ratio)

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- Large mixing bowl (at least 3 L)

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- Bench scraper — for dividing + handling dough

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- Rolling pin

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- Cast-iron skillet (26-30 cm / 10-12 inch) — workhorse version of this recipe

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- OR kamado grill at 315°C + pizza stone — Tier B version

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- OR pizza stone in 290°C oven — acceptable alternative

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- Instant-read thermometer — for water temperature

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- Clean kitchen towels — for bread-basket service

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- Parchment paper — for transferring rolled pitas



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## METHOD

# The Cook

### 1 Phase 1 · Mix + Knead — 12 minutes

1. In a small bowl, combine 310 g warm water (40°C) + 7 g yeast + 2 g sugar. Stir; let stand 5 min until slightly foamy (if using active dry yeast). If using instant yeast: skip the bloom; combine directly with flour in Phase 2.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine 500 g bread flour + 10 g fine sea salt. Stir.
3. Add yeast mixture + 15 g EVOO to the flour bowl. Stir with a spatula until shaggy + no dry flour remains.
4. Turn dough onto a lightly-floured work surface.
5. Knead 8 minutes by hand: push + fold + rotate. The dough should transform from rough + sticky to smooth + elastic. It will pass the windowpane test (stretch a small piece; should stretch thin without tearing).
6. If dough is too sticky at 5 min: sprinkle a tablespoon of flour + continue. If too dry: add a splash of warm water.
7. Alternative: stand mixer with dough hook at medium speed, 5 min.



#### WHY THIS WORKS

Bread flour (12.5% protein) has higher gluten-forming potential than AP (10-11%). The 8-min kneading develops the gluten network: the proteins glutenin + gliadin align + cross-link, forming the elastic + extensible matrix that traps steam during bake. The 62% hydration (310 g water / 500 g flour) is the calibrated sweet spot — enough water for steam pressure without making the dough too slack to roll.

## 2 Phase 2 · Bulk Ferment — 90 minutes

1. Lightly oil a clean large bowl with 1 tsp EVOO.
2. Place the kneaded dough in the oiled bowl. Turn once to coat with oil on all sides.
3. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a slightly-damp towel.
4. Ferment at room temperature (~24°C / 75°F) for 90 minutes.
5. After 90 min, the dough should have doubled in size + felt airy. Poke test: press a finger 1 cm into the dough; it should slowly + partially spring back. Full spring-back = under-fermented; no spring-back = over-fermented. Partial spring-back = ready.

### WHY THIS WORKS

During the 90-min bulk, yeast metabolizes sugar + produces CO<sub>2</sub> (which creates bubbles in the dough) + ethanol (which contributes to bread flavor) + lactic acid (which develops during longer ferments). The doubling is the visual cue for sufficient ferment; the poke test is the tactile cue. 90 min at 24°C is the calibrated time; cooler rooms need longer (100-120 min), warmer rooms can be faster (75 min).

## 3 Phase 3 · Divide + Shape + Rest — 40 minutes

1. Turn the bulk-fermented dough onto a clean work surface. It should be soft + airy.
2. Use a bench scraper to divide into 8 equal portions (each ~80 g). Use a scale; eyeballing this step produces uneven pita sizes.
3. Shape each portion into a tight ball: flatten slightly, then fold the edges into the center from multiple directions + pinch closed at the bottom. Flip seam-side down + cup gently with your palm to tighten the surface. The ball should be smooth + round.
4. Place shaped balls on a lightly-floured baking sheet or board, spaced 3-4 cm apart.
5. Cover with a damp kitchen towel.
6. Rest 30 minutes at room temperature.
7. During the rest, start preheating your cooking surface (cast iron / pizza stone / kamado).

### WHY THIS WORKS

The 30-min divide rest is essential for gluten relaxation. After the shaping step (which compresses + tightens the dough), the gluten network is under tension + the dough resists being rolled thin. The 30-min rest lets the gluten relax + become extensible again. Without this step, rolling produces a dough that snaps back + can't be rolled thin.

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## Phase 4 · Roll + Prepare Baking Surface — 15 minutes

1. Pre-heat your cooking surface NOW if not already. For cast iron: place on stovetop, max heat, 15 min minimum. For pizza stone in oven: preheat to 290°C for 45 min. For kamado: 315°C, 20-30 min to stabilize.
2. Lightly flour a rolling surface. Have the bench scraper + rolling pin + parchment transfer sheets ready.
3. Take one dough ball at a time; keep the others covered.
4. Flatten the ball with your palm, then roll with a rolling pin into a 15-18 cm / 6-7 inch disc, 3-4 mm thick. Rotate the dough 90 degrees between rolls to maintain round shape.
5. Transfer each rolled pita to a parchment sheet (easier to transfer to hot surface than a bare dough disc).
6. Brush each disc with olive oil (top side only).



### WHY THIS WORKS

3-4 mm thickness is the sweet spot: thick enough to hold steam pressure during bake (for pocket formation), thin enough for the steam to penetrate + push the top crust off. Thicker + the pocket doesn't form reliably; thinner + the dough tears when handled.

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## Phase 5 · Bake — 2 minutes per pita

1. Cast-iron method: transfer 1-2 rolled pitas to the hot cast iron surface (oil-side up first). They should hiss on contact.
2. Cook 60-90 seconds on first side. You'll see the dough begin to puff — it may form a few small bubbles first + then a single large pocket.
3. Use a spatula or tongs to FLIP the pita. Cook 60-90 seconds on second side.
4. Transfer the baked pita to the towel-lined basket; cover with a fold of the towel (traps steam + keeps pita pliable).
5. Repeat with remaining balls.
6. Each pita = ~2 min total bake time. All 8 pitas = ~20 min total baking. Work efficiently but don't panic — pita dough is forgiving.
7. Pizza-stone-in-oven method: place rolled pitas on the hot stone (use parchment as transfer) + bake 3-4 min per pita (one side only; the stone provides enough bottom heat + the oven top provides sufficient heat that flipping isn't required).



### WHY THIS WORKS

At 260-315°C surface temperature, the water in the dough flashes to steam in ~10 seconds. The steam pressure + the already-developed gluten network + the thin dough layer = the physics of pocket formation. The top crust separates from the bottom + the pita balloons. As the pita cools, the balloon collapses gently + the internal pocket remains.

### QUICK REFERENCE

## Timing Cheat Sheet

| STEP                       | TIME                      | CUE                                       |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Bloom yeast + combine wet  | T- 1 8 0 m                | 5 min bloom; foamy indicates active yeast |
| Mix + knead 8 min          | T- 1 7 5 to T-<br>1 6 7 m | Windowpane test; smooth + elastic         |
| Bulk ferment 90 min        | T- 1 6 0 to T-<br>7 0 m   | Doubled; partial spring-back on poke      |
| Divide into 8 × 80 g balls | T- 7 0 m                  | Use scale; shape tight balls              |

| STEP                                       | TIME               | CUE   |
|--|--------------------|---|
| Rest 30 min covered                        | T- 7 0 to T- 4 0 m | Gluten relaxation; surface preheating in parallel |
| Pre-heat cast iron / stone 15 min max heat | T- 4 0 to T- 2 5 m | Cast iron at 260°C+ at start of bake              |
| Roll each ball to 3-4 mm / 15-18 cm        | T- 1 0 to T+ 0 m   | Work one at a time; brush with oil                |
| Bake 2 min total per pita                  | T+ 0 to T+ 2 0 m   | 60-90 sec per side; puff at 30-45 sec             |
| Basket + towel cover                       | T+ 2 0 m+          | Traps steam; keeps pliable                        |

#### TROUBLESHOOTING

## Emergency Protocols

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## Technique Notes

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### ● **Universal: High-Heat Bread-Baking — The Pocket-Bread Archetype**

BREAD PEDAGOGY · HEAT-DRIVEN STRUCTURE

Pita is one member of a bread family that relies on extreme surface heat + rapid steam generation to produce their structure. Family members: pita (this recipe), naan (kamado-naan  already shipped), puri (deep-fried version of same logic), lavash (thinner + longer + even hotter), roti/chapati (dry-griddle variant), tortilla de trigo (Mexican + Spanish; similar dough ratio), crisp-flatbread variants. The shared rule: surface heat  $> 260^{\circ}\text{C}$  + thin dough = puff. Master pita + you can make any of these with minimal adjustment.

### ● **Universal: Gluten Relaxation — The 30-Minute Divide Rest**

BREAD HANDLING · GLUTEN PHYSICS

After dividing + shaping a dough into portions, the gluten matrix is under tension + resists being rolled or shaped further. The 30-minute rest under a damp towel lets the gluten relax + become extensible again. Universal rule: any dough that will be rolled or shaped after dividing needs a 15-30-minute rest first. Applies to: pita (this recipe), tortilla de trigo, pan de molde shaping, pizza dough shaping, focaccia stretch + fold, croissant laminating. Skipping the rest produces dough that snaps back + doesn't hold shape.

## ● **Universal: Hydration as Precision — The 62% Sweet Spot**

BREAD SCIENCE · DOUGH RATIOS

Pita dough hydration (water weight / flour weight) is calibrated at 62%. Different breads have different optimal hydrations: sourdough loaf ~75%, focaccia ~78%, baguette ~70%, pita ~62%, sandwich bread ~60%, bagel ~55%. Higher hydration = more-open crumb + more-flexible + requires more skill. Lower hydration = denser + stiffer + easier to handle. Pita's 62% is the calibrated balance: enough moisture for steam-driven pocket formation + stiff enough to roll thin + handle easily. Master the hydration-for-purpose framework; bake any style with deliberate structural choices.

## ● **Pantry Strategy: The Thursday Pita — Same-Day Bread**

WEEKNIGHT DISCIPLINE · SHORT-TIMELINE BREAD

Pita is the highest-leverage same-day bread in the kitchen: 2.5 hours from dry ingredients to warm bread, mostly passive (90-min bulk + 30-min rest). Start at 17:00 → warm pita at 19:30 for dinner. No overnight planning, no starter maintenance. Compare to sourdough (2-3 days) or naan (2 h with a starter). For a Thursday-night hummus + pita dinner or a last-minute Sunday-night tapas service, pita is the dish that doesn't force pre-planning. Universal weeknight bread solution.

## ● **No Limits: The Kamado-Pita Variant (Wood-Fired Heat)**

KAMADO DISCIPLINE · HIGH-HEAT SURFACE

Pita on the kamado at 315°C with a pizza stone produces a noticeably different pita: more-robust pocket, slight wood-smoke aromatic, occasional charred spots. The technique: kamado pre-heated 30 min to 315°C; pizza stone on the main grate, also pre-heated; add pitas one at a time; bake 60 sec per side flip. The kamado heat + the stone's direct heat-transfer = the closest home-kitchen version of a Middle Eastern tandoor-oven. Pablo-kitchen Saturday-summit pita. Noticeably better than cast-iron version for a dinner party; 20 min of pre-heat time is the main cost.

## 🔴 No Limits: Sourdough Pita — The 12-Hour Variant

SOURDOUGH APPLICATION · LONGER-FERMENT VARIANT

Replace the commercial yeast + sugar + 30 g water with 150 g fed sourdough starter (100% hydration). Bulk ferment 4-8 h at room temp OR 12 h refrigerated cold-proof. Bake same way. Sourdough pita has more-complex flavor (tanginess from lactic acid), longer shelf life (sourdough proteins are more stable), slightly-different texture (chewier, less-tender than commercial-yeast version). Use for weekend dinner parties where the schedule allows the longer ferment. The master sourdough loaf starter + sourdough starter nacimiento pages are prerequisites for this variant.

### PAIRING

## What to Drink

### 🔥 Application · Hummus + Pita

Warm pita torn into pieces + hummus  (Batch 4) + scattered olives + parsley leaves. 10-minute assembly.

*The universal Middle Eastern application. The pita warm from the oven + the hummus from the fridge = the dish that makes hummus complete.*

### 🔥 Application · Shawarma Wrap

Split pita open at one edge (knife) + stuff with: grilled meat (SV lamb shawarma, upcoming UMAMI-4), hummus , tahini sauce, shaved red onion, parsley, pickled turnip (optional).

*The classical shawarma format. Pita as the vehicle for a composite filling. Pita holds the structure without falling apart.*

### 🔥 Application · Spanish-Levantine Tapas

Pita + olive oil + Maldon + optional za'atar sprinkle = simple but elevated tapa. Pair with grilled seafood or cold cuts.

*Pita enters the Spanish tapas register when served with good oil + salt. A 3-minute tapa worth the dinner-party seat.*

### Application · Sandwiches

Pita pockets stuffed with: falafel + tahini + lettuce + tomato (vegetarian) / cold cut + cheese + vegetables (lunchtime sandwich) / fried egg + avocado + hot sauce (breakfast).

*Pita as sandwich vehicle is the Middle Eastern equivalent of sliced bread. More portable + structural than sliced bread; holds wet fillings better.*

### Application · Za'atar Manakish (Lebanese Flatbread)

Instead of baking as puffed pita: flatten rolled dough + brush with za'atar + olive oil mixture + bake. Becomes Lebanese za'atar flatbread (manakish).

*Same dough, different bake technique. Manakish is one of the most-celebrated Lebanese breakfast breads. A simple riff on this recipe.*

## CONTEXT

# Menu Ideas

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### **Thursday Hummus Dinner (4 guests)**

Warm pita + hummus  + olives + chopped salad (tomato + cucumber + parsley + lemon + oil). 30-minute dinner; pita from first mix to warm takes 2.5 h; everything else is 15 min.

### **Middle Eastern Mezze Night (8 guests)**

Pita + hummus + tzatziki + labneh + tabbouleh + falafel + grilled vegetable plates. Make 16 pitas (2 batches of 8). Dinner for 8 as spread-style meal.

### **Shawarma Dinner Party**

Grilled meat (lamb or pork SV + kamado-finish) + pita + all the fixings. Guests build their own wraps at the table. Kitchen theater + delicious dinner.

## Saturday Brunch

Pita + hummus + shakshuka + soft-boiled eggs + labneh + fresh fruit. 30-minute brunch for 4-6 with both savory + breakfast covered.

## Gift / Trade

Freshly-baked pita + a jar of hummus  + a bottle of good olive oil = complete Middle-Eastern kitchen-gift set. Hand-deliver or drop off same day.

### YOUR NOTES

## Cook Log

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### Session Notes

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ · Serves: \_\_\_\_ · Rating: \_\_ / 5

*Use this space to record what you changed, what worked, and what you'd do differently next time. Your future self will thank you.*



Stop following recipes. Start understanding food.

