

Fluvanna County Public Library

Spice of the Month Club

Za'atar (Spice Blend)

Flavor Profile: Bright, earthy, herby and toasty

Spice Blend Ingredients: hyssop, sesame seeds, salt, vegetable oil, sumac, and citric acid (Brand Name: Gel)

Za'atar is a multifaceted and dynamic because it's a blend of so many different flavors, textures, and fragrances. Even though it varies on where you are in the Middle East (specific recipes are sometimes closely-guarded secrets!), za'atar is generally a combination of dried oregano, thyme, and/or marjoram (woody and floral), with sumac (tangy and acidic) and toasted sesame seeds (nutty and rich). And, as if that weren't enough, za'atar sometimes contains salt, dried orange zest, dried dill, or the wild herb za'atar (also called hyssop, it grows throughout the Levant and is the mixture's namesake).

Za'atar encompasses such a wide range of flavors that it can be the bright note that both enlivens and anchors sliced tomatoes, the unifying force in a salad or a refreshing smashed cucumbers and salty, fatty feta, and the replacement for lemon and herbs on a roasted chicken. Consider adding it when you're looking for a spice mix that's earthy, savory, and tangy, all in one. In the Middle East, za'atar is often eaten with oil-dipped bread or labneh, or spread onto flatbread dough before it's baked into man'oushe.

If you're cooking with za'atar, you don't need any other spices – it can hold its own. But pairs well with garlic, fresh tender herbs, lemon, toasted nuts, and chile flakes. And if you're not going to be heating up za'atar in the cooking process, you can bring out the most flavor by blooming it in hot oil or butter. Heat the fat in a small skillet, take it off the heat, and add the za'atar – then drizzle over popcorn or toast.

Food Partners – On its own, za'atar makes a great dry rub for meats and grilled or roasted vegetables like cauliflower, potatoes and eggplant. It's an excellent complement to dairy; rolling a log of goat cheese in za'atar and pairing it with pita chips or crackers makes an easy and distinctive appetizer.

Healing Power – This flavor spice from the Middle East has been revered for its strong medicinal properties. The ingredients are rich sources of antioxidants. For example, sumac is composed of flavonoids while thyme and oregano are rich in thymol and carvacrol. Both these compounds have robust antioxidant and antiseptic properties.

1. Treatment of Chronic Diseases

Sumac, one of the crucial elements in the spice mix, contains quercetin that is able to destroy free radicals in your body and prevent the onset of cancer. According to numerous studies, sumac can really control the free radical damage by neutralizing them.

2. Prevents Coughing

The expectorant property of thyme prevents the formation of phlegm and mucus that can cause respiratory tracts to clog. It also has many other immunity strengthening properties that can ward off several illnesses.



3. Improves Cognition

There have been studies claiming that regular consumption of za'atar in your diet can improve your brainpower and cognition. The spice blend contains circulation-boosting power due to its rich mineral content that can enhance your brain and incite neural activity.

4. Treats Inflammation

You can not only add za'atar to your diet but can also make a paste or a salve that can be topically applied to the affected area for instant relief from painful joints and bug bites. It can have similar anti-inflammatory benefits when the spice is consumed through diet.

This is especially true if you are suffering from arthritis or any other inflammatory conditions.

5. Makes You More Energetic

The polyphenols and flavonoids found in this spice blend act as an energy booster that can get your metabolism fired up and keep you active throughout the day. Additionally, it also helps promote restful sleep that helps you feel fresh, preparing you to face each day with greater confidence as well as enthusiasm.

6. Mood Enhancement

There have been studies that claim that za'atar can improve mood and reduce the risk of depression. The compound phenol found in oregano and thyme can have direct mood-enhancing benefits that make you feel optimistic. It can also improve cognitive function and make you sharper in your daily tasks.

Homemade Za'atar

Ingredients

- ¼ cup sesame seeds
- ¼ cup sumac
- 3 tablespoons ground thyme
- 1 tablespoon dried marjoram
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- ½ tsp. sea salt

Instructions

1. To start, toast sesame seeds in a pan until fragrant and their color starts to change. Be careful not to burn them. Once toasted, remove the pan from the heat and allow seeds to cool.
2. Meanwhile, measure out the other recipe ingredients. Once the seeds have cooled off, mix all the ingredients together.
3. Pour the spice mixture into a spice jar and store for up to three months.
4. NOTE: Making Za'atar in smaller quantities is better than making large batches. If you do make a larger batch, store the extra spice blend in ziploc bags in the freezer until needed.

<https://hildaskitchenblog.com/recipe/zaatar-substitute/>



Grilled Flatbread (Man'oush) with Olive Oil and Za'atar (Middle Eastern)

Ingredients

- Store-bought flatbread
- Olive oil (to taste)
- 2 tablespoons of za'atar – divided (to taste)
- ¼ cup Labne (Middle Eastern strained yogurt – if unavailable, use strained Greek yogurt instead)

Instructions

1. Place flatbread on grill to reheat until crisp and blistered on both sides, about 1 minute per side. Brush with olive oil and sprinkle with za'atar as directed.
2. Place labne (or Greek yogurt) in a serving dish, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with za'atar. Serve bread with labne immediately.

<https://www.serious-eats.com/grilled-flatbread-zaatar-recipe>

Za'atar Chicken Thighs

Ingredients

- 4 bone-in chicken thighs, with skin
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 3 tablespoons za'atar, divided, or to taste

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Place chicken in a bowl and coat with olive oil. Season liberally with sea salt and black pepper on all sides.
3. Heat cast iron skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken thighs, skin-side down, to the hot skillet. Sprinkle 1 teaspoon za'atar immediately over each chicken thigh. Cook chicken, without turning, until skin is crispy and browned, 7 to 10 minutes.
4. Turn chicken so skin side faces up and remove skillet from heat. Sprinkle remaining za'atar evenly over each chicken thigh. Spoon some of the rendered chicken fat from the pan over the top of the za'atar.
5. Place the skillet in the preheated oven and roast until juices run clear and chicken is no longer pink near the bone, about 15 minutes.

NOTE: This chicken is great served with a fresh green salad of romaine, red onion, and tomato with a tahini-lemon dressing. You can use other cuts of chicken – just leave the skin on and note that cooking times will vary when using a cut other than a thigh, as well as if the chicken is boneless.

To make a tahini-lemon dressing for the salad, simply mix 3 tablespoons plain yogurt, 2 tablespoons tahini, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, and salt together.

<https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/262398/zaatar-chicken-thighs/?Inkid=usspnt>



Roasted or Air Fried Za'atar Baby Potatoes

Ingredients

- 1 bag of golden baby potatoes
- 2 tablespoons za'atar seasoning
- 1 ½ - 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Fresh lemon juice, crumbled feta, and chopped parsley for garnish (optional)

Instructions

1. Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees. If you're using an air fryer then set it to 400 degrees as well.
2. Wash and dry baby potatoes. Cut into halves.
3. Lay the potatoes on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet or in an air fryer.
4. Drizzle olive oil on top of veggies and add za-atar season, salt, and pepper.
5. Place baking sheet with veggies in the oven for 45-60 minutes until golden brown and fork-tender. If using an air fryer, place in the air fryer basket and air fry for 15-20 minutes tossing gently halfway.
6. Remove from oven or air fryer and garnish with a fresh squeeze of lemon, crumbled feta, and chopped parsley. Serve immediately.



<https://raodyrecipes.com/recipes/vegetarian-dishes/2019/07/16/zaatar-baby-potatoes/>

Baked Za'atar Egg Buns with Spinach and Feta

Ingredients

- 3 Kaiser rolls or French buns
- 6 eggs
- 3 1/3 cups spinach
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup feta, crumbled
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ tsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. za'atar seasoning
- Sea salt & black pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil + extra
- Butter
- Sour Cream, for serving (optional)

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. Heat oil in a skillet, add garlic and cook over low heat until soft. Increase the heat and add spinach, cook for 30 seconds or just until the spinach is wilted. Stir in the cream and season with salt and pepper.
3. Cut the rolls in half. Using your finger tips, gently push the middle of each bun until there is a hole large enough to fit a cracked egg.



4. Grease an ovenproof dish with butter and arrange the buns. Divide the spinach between the buns, crack an egg into each hole and dot feta around the eggs. Sprinkle with za'atar and cumin, season lightly with salt and pepper. Brush with extra olive oil.
5. Bake for 15-20 minutes, it depends on how you like your eggs. Serve at once, warm straight from the pan with sour cream.

<https://www.servingdumplings.com/recipes/baked-zaatar-egg-buns-with-spinach-and-feta/>

Simple Mediterranean Avocado Salad

Ingredients

- 2 large Roma tomato, sliced
- ½ seedless English cucumber (hot house cucumber), diced
- 1 shallot, sliced
- 2 avocado, peeled, pitted, and diced, and tossed in fresh lemon juice to avoid browning
- ¼ cup pitted Kalamata olives, more to your liking
- 3 to 4 ounces halloumi cheese, optional, cut into small cubes (Cheese Curds, Paneer, Queso Fresco, and Feta are all good substitutes – you can also just use croutons)
- 10-15 basil leaves, gathered together and thinly sliced (chiffonade)
- Greek extra virgin olive oil (only if using halloumi)

For Vinaigrette

- 1 lemon, zested and juiced
- ¼ cup Greek extra virgin olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 ½ tsp. za'atar spice, more to sprinkle
- Salt and pepper

Instructions

1. Prepare the vinaigrette. Place vinaigrette ingredients in a mason jar, cover lightly and shake until well-combined. Set aside for now (you'll want to give the vinaigrette another shake before using).
2. In a salad bowl, add all the salad ingredients except the halloumi cheese and basil. Pour the vinaigrette and give the salad a gentle toss. Taste and adjust seasoning, add a sprinkle more of za'atar spice. Add the basil, and give one very quick and gentle toss.
3. If adding halloumi cheese. Combine cheese cubes and about 1 to 2 tablespoons or so extra virgin olive oil in a small bowl. Toss to coat the cheese with the EVOO. Heat an indoor griddle over medium heat. Add cheese cubes and grill for 2-3 minutes, turning over on all sides, until lightly browned and nice char marks appear (it should be crisp on the outside and nice and melty on the inside).
4. Add the grilled Halloumi to the salad and serve immediately.

<https://www.themediterraneandish.com/simple-mediterranean-avocado-salad/>



Feta and Za'atar Omelette

Ingredients (2 servings)

- 2 large eggs
- 1 tsp. za'atar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (plus extra to serve)
- 1/3 cup feta cheese or firm goat's cheese (crumbled)
- Salt & black pepper (to taste)

Instructions

1. Beat the eggs in a bowl and season well with salt and pepper and of the za'atar. Heat the oil in a heavy-based frying pan, no bigger inches in diameter.
2. Pour in the beaten eggs and use a spatula to swirl the mixture around in the pan, drawing in parts of the omelet which have cooked and allowing egg to run into the gaps. Continue to do this until all the egg is just set. Scatter the cheese over the omelette and sprinkle the remaining za'atar over the top.
3. Drizzle with extra oil, if you like, before serving.

<https://www.nigella.com/recipes/guests/tony-kitous-and-dan-lepards-feta-and-zaatar-omelette>



½ tsp
than 7

Za'atar Spiced Tomatoes & Chickpea Flatbread

Ingredients

- 2 large heirloom tomatoes, thinly sliced (or a mixture of halved grape tomatoes)
- 1 tablespoon za'atar seasoning
- 1 (15 oz.) can chickpeas, rinsed
- 2 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 small shallot, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoon olive oil
- ¾ cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 cup chopped, peeled cucumber
- ½ cup chopped fresh mint
- 1 cup chopped fresh mint
- 1 cup chopped fresh parsley, divided
- Splash of hot sauce
- 2 to 3 Naan slices, toasted
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

1. In a large bowl combine the chickpeas, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Mash the chickpeas using a fork or potato masher. Add in the shallot, ½ cup parsley and olive oil. Toss to combine.
2. In another bowl combine the yogurt, cucumber, mint, and remaining parsley. Add in the hot sauce, salt and pepper; stir to combine.



3. Next, take the pieces of Naan bread and lay them on a plate or serving platter. Top each Naan flatbread with yogurt sauce, chickpea mixture, and tomato slices. Drizzle the tops of the tomato slices with olive oil and za'atar seasoning. Serve and enjoy!

<https://thecuriousplate.com/zaatar-spiced-tomatoes-chickpea-flatbread/>

Za'atar Pasta Salad (serves 8)

Ingredients

- Eggplant
- 1 lb. baby eggplant, cut into ½ inch cubes
- Olive oil
- Salt and Pepper

Za'atar Lemon Vinaigrette

- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1-2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 tablespoons za'atar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. sugar or maple syrup

Everything Else

- 1 lb. pasta, gluten free if desired
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, chopped
- 4-6 oz. cheese (feta, soft nut cheese, or queso fresco)
- Za'atar, toasted sesame seeds, and/or fresh parsley for garnish, if desired

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Grease a large baking tray then spread the eggplant in a single layer. Drizzle a bit of olive oil over top, and sprinkle some salt and pepper. Bake for 15-20 minutes, then stir the eggplant, and bake an additional 15 minutes or until very tender and golden brown. Remove from oven and let cool.
2. Meanwhile, cook the pasta according to package directions, when done cooking, drain and let cool. Toss with some extra virgin oil as it cools to keep it from sticking.
3. Using an immersion blender, a regular upright blending, or a sealable jar: combine all the ingredients for the za'atar vinaigrette. Blend or shake until you have a creamy emulsion. If using a jar, grate or press the garlic before adding.
4. In a large mixing bowl combine the cooled pasta, eggplant, cherry tomatoes, cheese, and za'atar dressing and toss to combine. Add parsley for garnish along with any other fresh herbs you like (e.g. thyme, oregano, savory). Finish off with toasted sesame seeds or additional za'atar to taste.
5. Enjoy immediately or store in the fridge until ready to eat.

<https://www.thecuriouslychickpea.com/zaatar-pasta-salad/>



Za'atar Spiced Hummus

Ingredients

- 1 (15 oz.) can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup tahini
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ tsp. salt (plus more to taste)
- 1 tsp. za'atar seasoning
- 2 tablespoons water (plus more, if needed)

Instructions

1. Place the chickpeas in a microwave safe bowl and cook on high for 1 minute.
2. Transfer the chickpeas to a blender and blend on high for 20 seconds.
3. Add the rest of the ingredients and continue to blend for 2-3 minutes until completely blended.
4. Continue to add water until you reach the desired consistency.
5. Taste and add additional salt, if needed.
6. If you're not serving it right away, store in the fridge and stir in a bit of water before serving, as the hummus will thicken when chilled.

<https://iheartvegetables.com/zaatar-spiced-hummus>

Za'atar Olive Tapenade

Ingredients

- 10 oz. green pitted olives, drained
- 3 tablespoons za'atar
- 2 tablespoons chopped sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Instructions

1. Place all the ingredients in a food processor and pulse until you obtain a slightly coarse tapenade. Refrigerate until ready to use.

<https://mayihavethatrecipe.com/simply-the-best-zaatar-olive-tapenade/>



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