

PLATHA

With its buttery layers, this flatbread—also called *paratha* and *roti*—is the Asian answer to the croissant. The great part is how low-tech it is: you can do everything with your hands, no mixer or oven required. Feel free to practice the professional technique (see page 178/*not provided*) or simply follow this modified method for home cooks. If using the professional technique, consider shaping the dough into 4 portions instead of 5 to give you larger pieces of dough to stretch.

Burma Superstar serves platha with Coconut Chicken Curry, but in Burmese teahouses, it's also common to eat the bread as a breakfast treat or sweet snack. To do this, right before heating up the griddle, flatten a round of dough, add mashed banana, and then fold the dough over and seal the edges. Once the pastry has been griddled, sprinkle sugar or drizzle a little condensed milk over the top if desired.

MAKES 5 FLATBREADS

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons sugar

1½ teaspoons salt

¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons lukewarm water

2 ounces unsalted butter, melted

2 tablespoons canola oil

Before you start, have ready 2 large mixing bowls and a large cast-iron pan or griddle (a well-seasoned wok works too).

In a large bowl that offers room for mixing the dough with your hands, combine the flour, sugar, and salt. Pour in ¾ cup of the water.

Using a circular motion, mix the water into the flour until a tacky mass forms. Then pull it into pieces: pluck golf ball-size pieces of dough from the mass (still keeping everything in the bowl) until the mass has been completely picked into pieces of dough. Punch the dough down a few times with your fists to knead it and bring it together. Repeat one or two more times. (This helps develop the elasticity of the dough).

Drizzle the remaining 2 tablespoons of water over the dough. Knead in the water by squishing the dough with your hands and punching it down. Once the water is incorporated, the dough should stick to your hands. If it is dry, knead in more water. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let rest for 20 to 50 minutes. The dough should feel soft and squishy through the plastic wrap.

Put the melted butter and oil into a separate large bowl.

Uncover the dough and pull into 5 pieces roughly 3 ounces each. Shape the pieces into balls and put them in the bowl with the melted butter, coating them on all sides. Cover the dough and let rest for 30 minutes. Keep the bowl in a place warm enough that the butter won't solidify. (If it does, fill another large bowl with hot water and place the bowl in the water to remelt the butter.)

Butter your palms with the butter from the bowl and smear a layer of butter on a work surface, preferably one that is not wood (which will absorb the oil). Put the balls on the surface.

For each ball, using your fingertips, start at the edges and pat the dough into an 8-inch round. Lift the edges of the dough with your fingertips and pull it gently toward you, shaking the dough up and down so it slaps against the surface as you stretch it. Stretch all sides of the dough this same way until you form a very thin square-ish shape about 14 inches across (or more). The dough should be thin enough that it is mostly translucent, like a foggy window. (It's okay if you have a couple of holes in the dough.) In places that are thick, spot-stretch it with your hands. If the dough resists stretching, work on another piece of the dough and come back to the stubborn one later. This lets the gluten in the dough relax a bit. If the dough folds on top of itself, simply pull the folds apart.

Once the dough is stretched out, dip your fingertips in the butter from the bowl and smear it across the dough. Fold one long side into the center of the platha. Drizzle lightly with more butter and oil. Fold the other side over until you have a long strip of folded dough. Then fold the dough in half again and again until you have an imperfect ball of dough. (If air pockets form, that's a good thing.)

Tuck the edges under to create more of an even ball and let the dough rest 20 minutes. Alternatively, place the dough in an oiled container. At this point, the platha can be refrigerated to be cooked later that day or up to 3 days later, or frozen for 1 month. (Defrost the dough overnight).

To cook the platha, flatten the ball of dough into a disk about 10 inches wide. Heat a large cast-iron griddle or skillet over medium heat. Once a drop of water sizzles on contact, put the platha in the pan and cook until evenly browned and golden in parts, 2 to 3 minutes. Flip over and continue to cook until golden brown on the other side and cooked through in the center, about 3 minutes more. Serve whole or cut into wedges.

Reprinted with permission from [Burma Superstar](#), copyright © 2017 by Desmond Tan and Kate Leahy. Published by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. Photographs copyright © 2017 by John Lee

