

Bob Beer's Boza Recipe

The easiest way to make boza is from boza! So, if you have some already to use as starter (see our resource links), skip to **Part B** (Making the boza itself).

If you aren't fortunate to have an awesome Turkish neighbor, or a Balkan deli making the stuff in your neighborhood, you need to establish your own starter.

Many online recipes will tell you to use "yeast." BUT -- there is a problem in translation here! In Turkish, the word used for yeast (*mayaya*) is a very general term that refers to anything used as a starter, whether it's for cheese, yogurt, boza, bread, etc. But these are all different organisms.

If you do use store-bought bread yeast, your product will be heavily alcoholic, and that's (well, maybe) not what you want. (The Greeks and Armenians of Istanbul made a more alcoholic version but it wasn't considered halal by Muslims. I don't know how they did this, or how they kept the starter from going acidic, and I have never seen a written source about their process.) This may eventually go acidic because of secondary fermentation, like vinegar production.

A sourdough starter will reportedly work, and so will yogurt, but they don't give the greatest results. However, they may "adjust" over time.

PART A: Establishing your starter from scratch (Bob's sort-of shortcut version):

INGREDIENTS:

1/4 c. grain (millet, bulgur, rice, cornmeal, rye)

My favorite grain to use is millet – the best boza in Turkey (Vefa, for example) is made from millet. In the US you can buy hulled millet but you still need to run it through an extremely fine strainer to get rid of the germ.

You can also make decent boza from bulgur or bulgur with a little rice added. Some folks use fine milled cornmeal (known as *kachamak*, in parts of the Balkans....)

1 ½ c water

1/4 c. sugar

1) Start your starter with 1/4 cup of grain; soak the grain overnight. Place into a saucepan, add 1 ½ c water, bring to a boil, then cover simmer on low heat until it is very soft, almost like congee. Add a little extra water during the boiling to keep it from burning.

2) Push the soft grain through a fine sieve into a bowl. You can blend it, but the texture will not be as good. Discard what's left in the sieve. Let cool.

Note: I use an EXTREMELY fine wire strainer. (I got mine at Sur le Table). Place the strainer over a large bowl. The easiest way to get the mixture through is to take a ladle or two of the mixture and put it into the strainer, then just push in circles with the ladle. (I used to do it with a spatula but that takes way too long.)

3) Add $\frac{1}{4}$ c sugar and mix well. You should have something the consistency of a milk shake; thick but pourable. Add a little water if you need to.

4) Divide the sieved grain into three portions. Keep first portion for the first fermentation, and refrigerate the other two portions. Let the first portion sit out open overnight to collect yeasts from the air.

5) The next morning, cover container with a cloth (and a rubber band to keep the flies out), and leave this first portion out to ferment at room temperature, 2 – 3 days. Check it every day and give it a stir a couple times a day.

6) When this first portion gets sour and bubbly (and possibly a bit funky smelling), bring out the second portion, and inoculate it with a tablespoon or so of your first portion. Discard the rest of the first portion.

7) Again, cover container with a cloth as before, and leave this second portion out to ferment at room temperature. This time the fermentation will go a lot faster, and it should eventually taste like boza - sweet and tart, in about a day, possibly a little more.

8) If it still smells a little "off", repeat steps 6-7 once more, inoculating the third portion with the culture from the second.

Usually three runs are sufficient and you will have an active starter that smells fresh and somewhat vinegary. It's safe to taste now; it will taste sweet/tart and slightly fizzy, texture almost like very smooth applesauce. Now you are ready to make your boza for drinking!

Scientific info for the biology geeks: :)

What has happened is, the mixture was "colonized" by wild yeasts and bacteria, some of which produce alcohol and some that produce lactic acid, and others that are just "spoilage" bacteria.

The first yeasts produce alcohol, which the lactobacillus converts into lactic acid. Lactic acid kills the "wrong" bacteria, the bacteria that produce it "win" the battle, and your starter finds a balance. When you start your second batch, you then have a more active culture of lactic acid-producing bacteria, and they ferment the batch before the "wrong" bacteria can take hold.

PART B. Making the boza itself:

Here, you are basically doing what you've already done, on a larger scale.

INGREDIENTS:

2 – 3 cups of grain of your choice (See **PART A: INGREDIENTS**)

2 – 3 cups of sugar

Water

Boza starter

- 1) Take 2 - 3 cups of your preferred grain and soak it overnight in water in a pot.
- 2) The next day, drain off the water and replace with new water -- enough to cover grain by a few inches, and bring to a boil. Reduce to a gentle simmer.
- 3) Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the grain is all a very soft mush, like congee. Add more hot water if necessary to keep the grain covered and consistency soft.
- 4) Let the whole mixture cool. You can let it sit overnight if you like. It may set up quite thickly. That's okay.
- 5) Sieve the mixture in fine sieve. (See **PART A, step 2** for details) (If you use bulgur or a bulgur-rice mixture you can blend it. If you use millet, don't; the germ of the millet is hard and you'll have a gritty texture. But even if you use bulgur, sieving gives a nicer consistency.
- 6) Add sugar to the sieved grain, the same amount as the dry grain you started with. Mix it in, then add water till you have the consistency of a "milkshake" or "thinnish smoothie".

It should pour easily but also be thick enough that you need a spatula to get the rest out. Or a spoon to get the last swallow out of your glass!
- 7) Add the last batch of starter (all of it), mix well, cover with a cloth and rubber band to make sure no fruit flies get in, and leave in a cool place to ferment. It will take a day or two generally. How sour to let it get is a matter of taste, of course. **BOZA!**

Once it gets where you want it, put it in the fridge, where it will keep several days; it will continue to get more tart. As long as you don't let it sit for an extremely long time, there should be no problem with it going bad.

ENJOY YOUR BOZA! – and be sure to save half a cup or so for your next batch. Once your starter is well established, the boza should only take a day or so to ferment.

In the old days, boza was served with ginger but the most popular way these days is in a water glass, with cinnamon sprinkled on the surface, and a few whole roasted chickpeas (the yellow unsalted kind) on top for crunch. In the old days, it was served with ginger.