

## **Pizza and Focaccia**

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My most important cooking tip is use good ingredients. They cost more but they're worth it. The essentials are dough rolled out flat and topping, of which the options are endless. Where I live in central BC I rely on the best quality canned tomatoes I can find. The classic best are genuine San Marzano from Italy but you have to look around and find what's best where you live. My favourite mozzarella cheese for pizza is either smoked or fresh mozzarella.

There are endless pizza and focaccia variations (just do a google search) but if you like a thin crust like I do, my main recommendation is to go easy on toppings. I like adding freshly chopped basil, arugula or other greens to a basic cheese pizza after baking, depending on what's in season. The rest of the year, I sometimes add pesto made from basil, kale or other fresh greens after baking. A nice variation on pizza is jalapenos and cheddar instead of mozzarella.

### **Recipe for two 16" or four 10" thin crusts: pizza and/or focaccia**

#### **First day**

1.5 cups water in a large bowl  
a pinch of instant yeast (less than 1/8 tsp. needed)  
½ to 1 cup whole wheat flour  
1 or more cups all purpose flour  
Mix, cover and store at room temperature (15-18 C).

#### **Later, you'll need:**

- 1-2 c all-purpose flour, depending on how much you used on day 1
- Extra virgin olive oil (see note at end about oil).

and for the pizza:

- 28 oz. can crushed plum tomatoes (enough for two pizzas).
- a few cloves of garlic
- salt, pepper, dried oregano to taste
- 1 ball smoked mozzarella (about 13 oz) per pizza

and for the focaccia:

- 2 med. Onions (per focaccia)
- 300 grams gruyere cheese (per focaccia)
- leaves from one bunch fresh rosemary
- pitted ripe or green olives (optional)

#### **Second day**

There should be a very small amount of foam on the top of the biga but other than peeking, there's nothing for you to do until tomorrow.

### **Third day, morning or early afternoon, the dough**

The top of the biga should be more foamy. At this point, you could store it in an airtight container for days or weeks in the refrigerator or freezer.

Gradually add all-purpose flour, mixing with a wooden spoon or heavy-duty spatula, until you can get it away from the sides of the bowl and onto a floured surface. Dust the top and sides with flour and start kneading. The amount of flour added does not have to be measured. Add it by feel. The volume of water you start with is what determines the size of your finished dough. Slowly work more flour in with your bare hands, kneading until it's more doughy than sticky. Pizza dough does not require as much kneading as other bread dough because the gluten development is not as important. When it feels smooth and is less sticky, dust it with flour and place it back into the well-oiled bowl. Cover and let rise at room temperature.

### **Pizza sauce – any time before the dough is ready**

Add several tablespoons of oil to a large pan on low to medium heat.  
Add 2-4 crushed or sliced garlic cloves.  
Add the tomatoes just as the garlic starts to sizzle.  
Add oregano and black pepper to taste.  
When the sauce starts to simmer, it's ready and you can turn the heat off.

### **Focaccia topping – any time before the dough is ready**

Add several tablespoons of oil to a large pan on low to medium heat. Add two thinly sliced onions and sauté until lightly caramelized. A long, slow sauté is better than a fast fry.

### **Final steps**

Set an oven shelf about halfway up and pre-heat to 500F. Your oven might give off some burnt food smells or trigger your smoke alarm. I take my smoke alarm down while baking.

Divide the dough in two (or four) and place one on a floured surface. Without further kneading, work the dough into the approximate shape of your sheet or pan but a little smaller, by pushing and pulling with your fingers and then a rolling pin. You'll need to flip it and dust it with flour a few times as you roll it out.

If you're using a cookie sheet or pizza pan with a solid bottom, dust it with flour or cornmeal.

Fold the dough in half and then half again. Pick it up and plop it into a position where it will unfold. Open it up and tease it out to its final shape. If using a screen or perforated sheet, don't press on it or the dough will go through the holes and get stuck. Instead, gently pull it into shape.

For pizza, spread a thin layer of sauce on the dough (about 1 cup), sprinkle with a little salt (note that there has been no salt so far) and cover with shredded mozzarella cheese. I use about 375 grams (13 oz) of mozzarella per 16" pizza. Bake until cheese starts to brown, about 7 minutes.

For focaccia, spread the caramelized onions, rosemary, optional olives and coarsely grated gruyere cheese. Sprinkle with salt to taste and bake at 500F until it starts to brown, about 5 minutes. It bakes faster than pizza because there's less moisture in the topping.

Re-heating leftover pizza or focaccia slowly on a steel griddle or skillet gives an excellent bottom crust.

I blog about travel and bread baking at [www.iberianpixels.blogspot.ca](http://www.iberianpixels.blogspot.ca)  
For more recipes, contact me at 250 398-5318 or [pteti@shaw.ca](mailto:pteti@shaw.ca)

#### **Choosing and cooking with extra virgin olive oil**

Due to fraud in the marketing of extra virgin olive oil, I recommend one of the following: buy organic, buy a brand with a lot number and best before date on the bottle, or buy one that you trust. There's a good book on this subject by Tom Mueller – *Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil*.

There are conflicting opinions about using olive oil for frying. Some apparent experts say it's bad and others say it's fine. I currently use EVOO for sautéing but I do it long and slow. I do not heat it to the smoke point.