

Neapolitan–Style Pizza

Time: 5 minutes to mix the dough, overnight to retard it, and about 6 hours intermittent work the following day.

From the crisply toqued chef with her basket of summer-ripe tomatoes, handmade mozzarella di bufala, and custom made beehive oven to the tired guy behind the counter slinging slices, you want pizza, you've got it. You want delivery? You've got it. Want DiGiorno? Got it. Want to make it at home? Let us count the ways.

Why are we wading into this mess? Because we *can*. The truth is no one in this country is producing real heirloom pizza flour these days—that *we* know of—but everyone seems to want pizza. Anson Mills' beautiful custom blend of ultra fine, strong bread flour and sweet European flatbread flour—which Glenn created exclusively for this recipe—produced pizza that left us wanting to eat around the filling to get to the crust.

Getting to the crust, however, was no piece of cake. As we've said in the past, home baking at high temperatures involves convincing your oven it's really a forge hearth lined with quarry stones and fueled by hard wood. And no matter how cleverly contrived the machinations, even the best home oven isn't going to cooperate completely. But we got pretty close. Close enough to make it worthwhile.

You'll note we call our pizza Neapolitan-style. The word "style" in the title suggests we're aware of deficits, and while we've struggled to get as close to authenticity as possible, we know we'll finish shy. (Sometimes even purists must administer the caveat that warns, "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.")

Widely regarded as the best pizza in the world, the guidelines for producing real Neapolitan pizza fall to the authority of the Association of True Neapolitan Pizza--which seeks to govern its preparation and ingredients and prevent *louche* Americans like us from absconding with its good name. All the same, we got pretty fair marks!

This pizza must use only natural ingredients: flour, salt, natural yeast, and water. No oil. *Check*. This dough must be kneaded by hand without mechanical intervention except by approved mixers. *By hand. Check*. This dough must be shaped by hand, without the use of a rolling pin. *Check*. The pizza must be crowned with nothing more than tomato, mozzarella di Bufala, olive oil and basil; or tomato, garlic, oregano and olive oil. *Margherita. Check*. The pizza must bake in a wood-fired dome oven at about 800 degrees Fahrenheit for no longer than 90 seconds. *Uhhhh*. How about 550 degrees for 4 minutes in a 1980's Jennair?

Neapolitan-*style*.

Baking Notes

When all is said and done pizza is a flatbread, the most ancient bread known to man. And understanding this bread's antiquity helped us more with our recipe than adhering to the DOC guidelines. We were fortunate to attend the Maine Kneading Conference in Skowhegan at the end of July and catch a workshop with master baker Stephen Lanzalotta. Until then—one third of the way through development of this pizza—our dough tasted phenomenally good, but its rise and texture were less than sublime.

Mr. Lanzalotta's workshop concentrated on slack doughs, the term bread bakers use to describe doughs that are wet and tricky to handle. Bakers speak of dough in terms of hydration: a baguette dough, for instance, is comprised by weight of 3 parts flour to 2 parts water, giving it a baker's hydration of 67%. The older the dough, historically, the wetter, harkening back to beer barm stirred with flour to make a slurry. The farther East a dough's antecedents, the wetter it's also likely to be according to Mr. Lanzalotta, who cited the Egyptian *bedja* with a flour to water ratio of 1 to 1 as among the wettest and most ancient breads. So pizza, a flatbread, wants a pretty high hydration.

Once baked, a Neapolitan pizza should have a high edge that is crisp, but not over baked, an open crumb with a pleasing chew, and well-developed flavor. We got those, too.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a digital scale, a large mixing bowl, a whisk, a wooden spoon, a plastic dough scraper, a metal dough scraper, a pizza peel, a little tea strainer, a couple of pastry brushes, a pizza stone, and 2 long oven mitts.

Ingredients

For the dough:

12 ounces (just over 2 cups) Anson Mills Pizza Maker's Flour
1 generous teaspoon fine sea salt
½ teaspoon instant yeast
10.3 ounces (about 1 ¼ cup), spring or filtered water, cool

For the sauce:

4 teaspoons (1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon) fine olive oil
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1 ½ cups pure strained tomato product such as Bionaturae's Organic Strained Tomatoes
Fine sea salt, black pepper and crushed red pepper to taste

For the topping:

Extra virgin olive oil to drizzle
1 5-ounce ball of fresh buffalo mozzarella, cut into ⅛-inch thick slices (1.5 oz per pizza)
15 fresh basil leaves, washed

For the bottom:

3 tablespoons Anson Mills Heirloom Semolina

Directions

1. *Make the dough:* Place the flour, salt and yeast in a large mixing bowl and whisk well to combine. Make a well in the bowl and pour the water into the center of the

Over the course of his demonstration Mr. Lanzalotta manipulated 30 pounds of very wet dough possessing a hydration of about 89% with grace and dexterity, clarifying, among other things, what had, for us, been a central mystery of slack dough handling: how you can get your hands on a dough like this without gluing your fingers together. You do this by sealing the dough within a veil of flour, thus protecting it from drying out and tearing. Once that veil is in place, additional flour will not infiltrate the dough itself; the additional flour will, however, give the baker a means of moving the dough around and working with it.

By increasing the baker's hydration of our dough to 85% (heirloom new crop flour is moister than shelf-stable flour or we would have gone even farther), we were able, essentially, to use our existing recipe but with very different, and significantly superior, results. There is so little muscularity within the gluten matrix of a slack dough that nothing interrupts its oven spring in the first moments of punishing heat. The heat drives moisture from the dough quickly, leaving it moist in the center and lightly crisp outside.

The other good news is that preparing this dough is virtually effortless. A slack dough is such a pussycat, it needs no muscular kneading, just a short round of

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well. Stir with a wooden spoon until the ingredients come together to form a wet dough, 1 minute. When the dough has come together, begin kneading it by hand, using pulling and pushing motions to lift the dough up from the bowl and snap it back down. Continue “kneading” the dough in this fashion until it is smooth and elastic, 2 or 3 minutes. Scrape down the bowl and cover it with plastic wrap. Refrigerate overnight.

2. *Proof the dough:* The following day remove the dough from the refrigerator and let the bowl stand at room temperature until the dough loses its sluggish appearance and becomes lively and bubbly, 4 or 5 hours. Use a plastic spatula to scrape down the sides of the bowl and fold the dough over upon itself with a few light strokes. Cover the bowl and rest the dough 30 minutes. Repeat the folding strokes once more and rest 15 minutes. Repeat once more, resting the dough 15 minutes.

3. *Make the sauce:* While the dough is rising, melt the garlic in the olive oil in a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan over low heat, about 3 minutes. Add the puréed tomatoes and cook to a simmer, 5 minutes. Simmer lightly, but do not reduce to a thick sauce. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Remove from the heat and set aside.

4. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position; remove additional racks. Place a pizza stone on the rack and heat the oven to 550 degrees.

5. *Round the dough:* Flour a work surface or wooden dough board liberally. Scrape the dough out of the bowl and onto the board. Toss a generous amount of flour on top of the dough and round it by cupping both hands around the sides of the dough and drag its bottom against the surface, using friction to stretch and tighten the dough into a smooth, round ball sealed with a veil of flour. Rest the dough 10 minutes. Use a metal bench knife to cut the dough into 3 7-ounce pieces. Flour and round each piece. Let the dough rest about 10 minutes.

6. *Shape the dough.* Working one disc of dough at a time, flatten the dough lightly with your fingertips.

Sprinkle or sift (sifting is easier) a tablespoon of mixed semolina on the surface of a baker’s peel. Transfer the dough to the peel. Flour your hands and stretch the dough from the center out into a 10-inch round. If the dough sticks, lift an edge gently where it is sticking and sprinkle more semolina on the peel.

7. Drizzle the dough with olive oil and brush the oil across the dough surface. Use a clean pastry or basting brush to brush any excess semolina from the peel. Spoon about ¼ cup of tomato sauce over the dough surface and smooth lightly with the back of a spoon. Slide it onto the pizza stone and close the oven door quickly. Bake 2 minutes. Open the oven door and quickly pull the rack out slightly using long

rhythmical push-pull after its initial mixing.

We prefer the flavor of our dough when it has rested overnight in the refrigerator, but this is not strictly necessary. You may make the dough and bake the pizza the same day. Once the dough begins to look lively, (2 to 3 hours after mixing if not refrigerated overnight, and 4 to 5 hours if the dough was cold), it will require three or four brief “interventions” (Mr. Lanzalotta’s term for light hand manipulations) to refresh the environment. We did this with a plastic dough scraper and light folding motions while the dough was still in the bowl.

Thereafter, the trick is to get the dough into the oven before it over-proofs. The oven needs 10 minutes recovery time between pizzas.

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The mixed ancient emmer and heirloom corn semolina that comes with the pizza flour offers beautiful flavor nuance to the crust bottom and allows easy transfer from peel to stone. It won’t burn on the crust bottom, but what remains on the peel after baking *will* burn on the peel. Between batches of pizza we sweep any semolina that remains scattered on the stone into a bowl

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potholders. Arrange the mozzarella slices on the pizza. Shove the rack back in and close the door. Bake 2 more minutes or until the pizza is dark golden and the cheese has melted. Remove the pizza from the oven and transfer it to a cutting board. Cool slightly and top with fresh basil. (You can sweep the semolina that remains scattered on the stone into a bowl using long mitts and an old, clean cloth.) Let the oven recover its temperature, about 10 minutes, while you are stretching and saucing the next disc of dough. Continue to bake the remaining two pizzas in the same manner.

Makes 3 10-inch pizzas

using long mitts and an old, clean cloth.

An adjustment we do make is to bake the pizza for 2 minutes with olive oil and sauce before laying the cheese on the dough. We brave nuclear heat to lay the mozzarella slices on the top of the pizza once the crust is set. We do this to prevent the cheese from over baking and looking like curdled plastic, as it otherwise would, because our conventional oven can't get the job done in 90 seconds.

One last thing: if you find yourself having difficulty stretching this dough on a peel or getting the dough off the peel onto the stone, you may wish to use a parchment sheet. The dough is easily stretched by oiling the parchment--forget the semolina in this case--and can be transferred to the stone directly on the paper. The crust won't be quite as nice, but the work will be much easier.