

Thin-Crust Pizza

BY COOK'S ILLUSTRATED • PUBLISHED JANUARY 2011

Kneading our pizza dough's ingredients in the food processor was quicker and just as efficient as using a stand mixer. To keep our Thin-Crust Pizza recipe from puffing as it cooked and to infuse it with flavor, we let it proof in the refrigerator for up to three days. Finally, placing our pizza stone as close to the upper heating element as possible

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS



crisped our Thin-Crust Pizza and browned it.

INGREDIENTS

DOUGH

3 cups (16 ½ ounces)
bread flour, plus
more for work
surface (see note)

2 tablespoons sugar

½ teaspoon instant or
rapid-rise yeast

1 cups ice water
⅓ (about 10 ½ ounces)
(see note)

1 tablespoon
vegetable oil, plus
more for work
surface

1 teaspoons table salt
½

INSTRUCTIONS

MAKES TWO 13-INCH PIZZAS

Our preferred brand of whole-milk mozzarella is Sorrento Galbani. You can shape the second dough ball while the first pizza bakes, but don't top the pizza until right before you bake it. If you don't have a baking stone, bake the pizzas on an overturned and preheated rimmed baking sheet. It is important to use ice water in the dough to prevent overheating the dough while in the food processor. Semolina flour is ideal for dusting the peel; use it in place of bread flour if you have it. The sauce will yield more than needed in the recipe; extra sauce can be refrigerated for up to a week or frozen for up to a month.

1. FOR THE DOUGH: In food processor fitted with metal blade, process flour, sugar, and yeast until combined, about 2 seconds. With machine

SAUCE

1 (28-ounce) can
whole peeled
tomatoes, drained
and liquid discarded

1 tablespoon extra-
virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon red wine
vinegar

2 medium garlic
cloves, minced or
pressed through
garlic press (about 2
teaspoons)

1 teaspoon table salt

1 teaspoon dried
oregano

¼ teaspoon ground
black pepper

CHEESE

1 ounce finely grated
Parmesan cheese
(about ½ cup)

8 ounces whole milk
mozzarella,
shredded (about 2
cups) (see note)

running, slowly add water through
feed tube; process until dough is just
combined and no dry flour remains,
about 10 seconds. Let dough stand 10
minutes.

2. Add oil and salt to dough and
process until dough forms satiny,
sticky ball that clears sides of
workbowl, 30 to 60 seconds. Remove
dough from bowl and knead briefly on
lightly oiled countertop until smooth,
about 1 minute. Shape dough into
tight ball and place in large, lightly
oiled bowl. Cover tightly with plastic
wrap and refrigerate for at least 24
hours and up to 3 days.

3. **FOR THE SAUCE:** Process all
ingredients in food processor until
smooth, about 30 seconds. Transfer to
medium bowl or container and
refrigerate until ready to use.

4. **TO BAKE THE PIZZA:** One hour before
baking pizza, adjust oven rack to
second highest position (rack should
be about 4 to 5 inches below broiler),
set pizza stone on rack, and heat oven
to 500 degrees. Remove dough from
refrigerator and divide in half. Shape
each half into smooth, tight ball. Place
on lightly oiled baking sheet, spacing
them at least 3 inches apart; cover
loosely with plastic wrap coated with
nonstick cooking spray; let stand for 1
hour.

5. Coat 1 ball of dough generously with
flour and place on well-floured
countertop. Using fingertips, gently

flatten into 8-inch disk, leaving 1 inch of outer edge slightly thicker than center. Using hands, gently stretch disk into 12-inch round, working along edges and giving disk quarter turns as you stretch. Transfer dough to well-floured peel and stretch into 13-inch round. Using back of spoon or ladle, spread 1/2 cup tomato sauce in thin layer over surface of dough, leaving 1/4-inch border around edge. Sprinkle 1/4 cup Parmesan evenly over sauce, followed by 1 cup mozzarella. Slide pizza carefully onto stone and bake until crust is well browned and cheese is bubbly and beginning to brown, 10 to 12 minutes, rotating pizza halfway through. Remove pizza and place on wire rack for 5 minutes before slicing and serving. Repeat step 5 to shape, top, and bake second pizza.

TOPPING TIPS: We like our Thin-Crust Pizza simply dressed with tomato sauce and handfuls of shredded mozzarella and Parmesan, but additional toppings are always an option--provided they're prepared correctly and added judiciously. (An overloaded pie will bake up soggy.) Here are a few guidelines for how to handle different types of toppings:

HEARTY VEGETABLES Aim for a maximum of 6 ounces per pie, spread out in a single layer. Vegetables such as onions, peppers, and mushrooms should be thinly sliced and lightly sautéed (or microwaved for a minute or two along with a little olive oil) before using.

DELICATE VEGETABLES AND HERBS

Leafy greens and herbs like spinach and basil are best placed beneath the cheese to protect them or added raw to the fully cooked pizza.

MEATS Proteins (no more than 4 ounces per pie) should be precooked and drained to remove excess fat. We like to poach meats like sausage (broken up into 1/2-inch chunks), pepperoni, or ground beef for 4 to 5 minutes in a wide skillet along with 1/4 cup of water, which helps to render the fat while keeping the meat moist.

STEP-BY-STEP

No More Snap Back

Dough that shrinks back when you roll it out is one of the pesky factors that keep a crust from ever baking up truly thin.



1. ADD JUST ENOUGH WATER Create a relatively wet—but not too wet—dough, which stretches without tearing and stays tender once baked.



2. PROOF IN FRIDGE Chill the dough in the refrigerator for at least 24 hours. This leads to less rise, a more flexible dough that holds its shape, and a thinner (and more flavorful) final crust.



3. DIVIDE Halve dough and shape into balls. Place on lightly oiled baking sheet and cover with oiled plastic wrap. Let rest 1 hour to allow dough to return to room temperature.



4. FLATTEN On well-floured surface and using fingertips, gently flatten dough into 8-inch disk, leaving outer edge slightly thicker than center to create a fatter "handle."



5. STRETCH

With hands, stretch dough into 12-inch round, working along edges and giving dough quarter turns. Transfer to well-floured peel and stretch to 13-inch round.

TECHNIQUE

Keeping Inflation Down

The biggest factor contributing to a crust that turns out thick versus thin is the size of the air bubbles in the dough before it goes into the oven. The more the bubbles expand with carbon dioxide as the dough ferments (or “proofs”), the thicker the final crust. Could a longer rise in the refrigerator fix the problem?

EXPERIMENT

We made two batches of dough, leaving one to rise at room temperature for four hours and placing the other in the refrigerator for 24 hours, then baked them both according to our recipe.

RESULTS

The dough left to rise at room temperature produced a crust that puffed up like focaccia, while the dough that rose in the fridge baked up with smaller bubbles and boasted far more flavor.

EXPLANATION

Fermentation is a two-phase process: First, the carbohydrates in the dough are converted by the yeast to sugars, alcohol, and acids. Next, these convert to carbon dioxide, expanding the bubbles created in the dough when it was first mixed. At room temperature, the process moves rapidly to the production of carbon dioxide. But in the fridge, the process is slowed way down. With enough time, the complex-tasting sugars, alcohol, and acids form, but very little carbon dioxide gets converted, so the bubbles in the dough stay small and the crust bakes up both thin and more flavorful.

PUFFY AND BLAND



THIN AND FLAVORFUL



TECHNIQUE

Shrink Your Headroom



Baking the pizza on the top rack—rather than the usual approach of placing it near the bottom of a

home oven—
means heat will
hit the top of
the pie,
browning the
toppings before
the crust
overcooks.