

Focaccia Made From Poolish

© 2008 Mark Witt and Bread Technique

Focaccia is a traditional Italian flat bread that is reminiscent of pizza. While everyone is familiar with pizza this may not be true with focaccia. The focaccia made using this method is light in texture and delightfully chewy. It is topped with tomatoes and herbs and a good hard cheese. I bet you'll like it. It has an occasional big bubble in the dough which goes along with the light texture. If you like a more traditional fine crumb focaccia simply punch the dough down between proofings.

Accompaniment or Snack...

In some Italian restaurants focaccia is served as menus are delivered. This delicious starter is sometimes flat in profile and sometimes billowy. What the breads served as focaccia all have in common is an infusion of herbs, olive oil and light toppings including tomatoes and cheese.

While the toppings may share some similarities to pizza, the differences are important to note. Pizza may have a sauce of tomatoes or Alfredo but focaccia has only herbs and sometimes diced or sliced tomatoes. The pizza pie cheese will include mozzarella and focaccia more likely Romano, Parmesan or Asiago. Focaccia is bread with light toppings. Pizza is topping with bread below. Focaccia makes a great snack, but few would confuse it with a full meal.

One Dough for Pizza and Focaccia!

At my website - www.breadtechnique.com - you'll find another recipe for pizza crust. The recipe is the same up to the shaping step. I'm convinced your family and guests will agree that both of these bread based dishes are very comforting, filling and fun.

There are only five ingredients in the dough, which is based on a preferment called poolish. Those ingredients are bread flour, water, yeast, salt and herbed or regular olive oil.

I believe that the flavorful blend and the slow fermentation makes



for a sturdy base for pizza and when used for focaccia, a perfect compliment to pasta dishes, chicken picatta, veal parm or eggplant rollatini.

Should focaccia really take three days?

Three days seems a long time in this day of 30 minute meals. Using poolish for focaccia is not a conventional approach but it works well. The overnight proofing steps mean that this dough can take up to three days to be ready to top and bake. The flavor is fantastic when you let the yeast work slowly. I always start a batch or two of poolish on Thursday night before bed for use on the weekend. By Friday morning it goes in the fridge and it's final purpose is at that point undefined. It could

Focaccia Dough from Poolish

Day 1: Make Poolish and place in fridge. (see reverse)

Day 2: Place in stand mixer bowl:
Small batch of poolish aged for a day in the fridge (750 grams)
1 teaspoon instant yeast (4 grams)
200 grams bread flour (1 1/3 cup)
1 1/4 teaspoon salt (11 grams)
3 tablespoon herb oil (40 grams)
6-10 tablespoons (80-100 grams) herbed olive oil to drizzle

Mix with flat beater for 45 seconds to 1 minute, just to bring together. Switch to dough hook and knead for a total of 10-12 minutes with one or two ten minute rests to allow good hydration. When dough is smooth and elastic remove it to a well oiled bowl and with oiled hands form a ball. Turn dough ball over in residual oil in bowl to coat. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and place in the fridge overnight.

Day 3: Remove dough from fridge and deposit onto a baking pan 18" x 13" that has been well oiled with herbed or plain olive oil. Let it rest if necessary and stretch until the dough nearly fills the pan. If the dough becomes resistant to stretching, a rest will make further stretching easier. Once stretched, spray the dough with cooking spray, cover with plastic wrap and begin the final proof. The dough should be about double in height in 60-90 minutes. Remove the plastic wrap. Dimple the dough with oiled fingers. Add toppings then pour about two or three ounces of herbed olive oil across the service evenly. Bake in preheated 375 degree oven for 25 minutes rotating once, then add cheeses. Bake 10-15 minutes more or until golden brown. Cool, slice and enjoy!

Direct Method

In the stand mixer bowl combine:
(by weight)
550 grams bread flour
6 grams instant yeast
11 grams salt
400 ml/grams water
40 grams herb oil

(by measure)
5 level cups bread flour
1 1/2 tsp instant yeast
1 1/4 tsp salt
14 fl oz water
3 tbs herbed oil

Mix with flat beater for about 1 minute on low speed. Knead with hook four minutes. Rest 10 minutes. Knead additional 10 minutes with hook. Turn into well oiled bowl and form ball with oiled hands, turning dough to coat. Cover with plastic wrap Proof till double. Spread on rimmed baking sheet, cover and proof till double in height, dimple, sprinkle toppings, drizzle herbed oil, bake as at left.

become bagels, cinnamon rolls, focaccia, pizza, ciabatta or just about any other yeast bread product.

Sometimes the request for focaccia comes with a short deadline so there are instructions to cut the time down to about four hours on the recipe card and the DVD. Plan if you can, rush if you must.

Poolish is flexible

Each of the recipes you will find at www.breadtechnique.com starts with the same sized batch of poolish. That allows flexibility and slow fermentation in one easy step. The recipe is included below.

Three days before the focaccia is needed, make the poolish. Stir together 350 grams of bread flour (2 ½ cups) and a pinch of instant yeast in a two quart bowl. Add 400 grams(ml) which is (14 oz) of good quality water. Stir this till it resembles a heavy batter. Cover with plastic wrap. Let set on the counter for 8-12 hours. It will double in bulk and resemble tapioca pudding. Store in fridge overnight.

Focaccia topping

Pizza toppings are of the cooks choosing and so are toppings those for focaccia. This is my favorite topping mix, vary it as you choose. If herbed oil was made recently you won't need to chop fresh herbs, just use the left over herb pieces from that recipe. Otherwise, gather some fresh herbs: 2-3 ounces of basil; a small sprig of rosemary; four or five sprigs each of oregano and thyme. Wash and dry the herbs and remove the leaves from the stems. Chop them your favorite way. Use a chef's knife, mezza luna or roll the small leaves inside the basil and create a chiffonade with scissors. Mince two large cloves of garlic. Drain a small can of petite diced tomatoes. Heat two teaspoons of olive oil to just below the smoke point. Turn off the heat. Add the chopped herbs and garlic. Stir till just coated. Add well drained diced tomatoes. Stir to combine and remove to a bowl. The topping can be done a day or two ahead if you like. Mixing herbs and tomatoes together creates a topping mix to easily distribute on the prepared focaccia dough.

Adding final ingredients

A day before the Focaccia is needed, bring the poolish to room temperature and place in the stand mixer bowl. Sprinkle on an

Basic Small Batch Poolish

(makes about 750 grams)

Mix together in a 2 quart bowl to heavy pancake batter consistency:

2 ½ cups (350 grams) bread flour
pinch of yeast (1/8 tsp or a little less)
14 ounces of good tasting water (400 ml)

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and leave on the counter overnight (8-12 hours). In 8-12 hours it will be double in bulk, bubbly and will resemble tapioca pudding. Move the poolish to the refrigerator to store it there for up to two days. It can also be used right away, but you'll sacrifice flavor.

© 2007 Bread Technique

WWW.BREADTECHNIQUE.COM
is a website resource supported by the
sale of DVDs. Visit today for more
information.

additional teaspoon of instant yeast. Cover the yeast with a mound of 200 grams (1 1/3 cups). Next add 11 grams (1 1/4 teaspoon) of salt on top of the flour mound. Somewhere near the edge of the bowl pour 40 grams (3 tablespoons) of herbed olive oil or extra virgin olive oil.

Mount the flat beater. Stir on low speed for about 45 seconds. Clean off the flat beater and mount the dough hook. Machine knead for about 4-6 minutes. Stop the mixer and let the dough rest for 10-15 minutes. Resume the machine kneading for another 4-6 minutes until the dough is smooth and elastic. It should be very sticky, clear the sides of the bowl but cling to the bottom of the bowl. A little more flour may be necessary to clear the sides of the bowl. Add a tablespoon of flour at a time.

With oiled hands, turn the dough into a 4 quart or larger mixing bowl that is smeared with 1 or 2 teaspoons of olive oil and form a ball. Flip the dough over to coat both sides. Cover and place in the fridge overnight. Punch it down once or twice if you like a finer crumb and a flatter bread. Personally I like it airy with an occasional large hole so I handle it gently to preserve the bubbly structure

Spread and stretch the dough

The day before the focaccia is needed, remove the dough from the fridge and let it warm to room temperature for about an hour. Remove the dough from the bowl onto a well oiled rimmed baking pan about 13" x 18". Spread it out as near to the edges as possible then rest for five minutes and spread again. If the dough won't quite reach the edges that is okay.

One last proof is in order. Spray with cooking spray and cover with plastic wrap. Put the covered pan in the fridge for additional flavor for up to a day if you are not ready to begin the final proof. The last proof will leave the focaccia about twice as tall as it started and will take 1-2 hours depending on the temperature of the dough and of your kitchen. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit at least an hour before you expect to bake.

Dimple, top and bake

When the final proof is completed dimple the surface of the focaccia with oiled finger tips and evenly sprinkle the herb topping. Drizzle the focaccia with herbed oil liberally using 2-3 ounces of oil. Place focaccia in the oven on the middle rack and

Rotate the focaccia after 10-15 minutes. At about 25 minutes add cheeses and bake for 10 - 15 minutes more. The total bake time will be about 35 minutes. When finished the focaccia will be golden brown, the cheeses set and crusty.

Let the focaccia cool for at least 20 minutes then slice and enjoy. Only slice what you think you need for the meal at hand because the focaccia keeps better when it is unsliced.

Double wrap the unused portion in plastic wrap when it is completely cooled.

Please visit my website for more free recipes, cooking tips and news about new instructional baking DVDs. The DVDs make great gifts and reference material.