

Pizza on the Big Green Egg

by Peter Reinhart

Pizza is the perfect food, or so I'm told, and so I believe. Its popularity across the world certainly establishes it as a force with which we all reckon. When I lived in Providence, Rhode Island (1999-2003) I discovered a new kind of pizza at the city's most famous restaurant, Al Forno, that totally expanded my perception of what pizza could be. It was here that the late great George Germon, along with his wife Johanne Killeen, created and gave to the world a most memorable version that they called "grilled pizza." When I was writing my book, *American Pie: My Search for the Perfect Pizza*, George taught me his method, which I then adapted for home cooks for use on their backyard grills, and have now updated for use on the Big Green Egg, an even more perfect tool for this style of pizza. But first, let me say a few things about pizza in general.

The Crust

It has long been my contention that it is the crust, not the toppings that make a pizza memorable. I've seen some expensive, fresh ingredients wasted on bad crust, or even more often, a decent dough ruined in an oven or on a grill that was not hot enough to properly bake it. Fortunately, cooking the dough over hot coals on a Big Green Egg is an ideal way of applying high heat to a properly fermented dough.

The single biggest flaw in most recipes is the failure to remind you to rest the dough overnight in the refrigerator to let the enzymes in the flour go to work, bringing out the subtle flavors in the dough. The long rest also relaxes the gluten protein, allowing you to shape the dough easily.

What type of flour?

Unbleached flour is, without question, a given ... it simply delivers more flavor and aroma than bleached flour. For this recipe I suggest all-purpose flour because it is more tender – that is, less hard (the hardness of flour is based on the amount of protein it contains) – and is less elastic than higher protein flours. Softer flour will be have a softer chew. The dough formula below will work with both all-purpose flour and also Italian “00” flour, which is now widely available. “00” flour is, by its nature, very easy to form. Try it both ways, unbleached all-purpose flour or “00” and decide for yourself which you prefer. My guess is, like pizza in general, for every ten people who make the dough, there will be eleven opinions.

Commentaries

This recipe utilizes the pain ancienne, delayed cold fermentation technique. Using the delayed fermentation method evokes the full potential of flavor trapped in the flour. The small amount of yeast is just enough to gas up the dough without eating up all the natural sugars during fermentation. The result is a naturally sweet, thin golden crust that crisps on both sides, as the grill heat essentially fries the oil on the dough’s surface into the crust, but retains enough moisture to taste creamy in the mouth.

The key to great pizza is a properly hot grill, positioned at just the right distance from the coals. The race between browning the crust and melting the cheese is a great culinary drama, and when everything converges at exactly the same moment you will have a truly memorable experience. The thinner you can stretch the dough without tearing it, and the more evenly you stretch it, the more likely that this baking convergence will occur. Grilling the dough on both sides is one the tricks that allows this to happen.

It is perfectly acceptable to add a small amount (about 10%) of whole wheat

or rye flour to the dough, substituting it for an equal amount of the white flour. This gives the pizza a more rustic or country quality, kind of a peasant-style crust.

Remember this axiom: No matter how good the toppings, no pizza will be memorable without a great crust. But, a great crust with excellent toppings – ahhh –that will be an unforgettable experience!

Topping the Pizza

Less is more – but make the less truly more by using quality ingredients, like San Marzano tomatoes.

The first grilled pizza you make should probably be a simple Margherita-style sauce and cheese pizza, you can always add toppings and get more inventive once you master a basic pizza and, frankly, many people still prefer this classic to all the other types. For this pizza, add a garnish of 3 or 4 fresh basil leaves that have been cut into slivers just before serving, and sprinkled over the top.

Your sauce should not be too thick as it will evaporate when it bakes. You do not need a lot of sauce and you do not need red sauce. Pesto, white or brown sauce, and just cheese without sauce are viable options. Fresh clams, tossed in garlic oil and spices (as made justifiably famous at Frank Pepi's Pizzeria in New Haven, Connecticut), is an amazing topping with just cheese and no red sauce.

I prefer a blend of three cheeses. One is a fresh hard cheese (not boxed or pre-grated) such as Romano, Asiago, Parmesan or Sonoma Dry Jack. The second is a good "melter" such as mozzarella, Monterey Jack, cheddar, Fontina, provolone, or Gruyere. The third can be any favorite, including some version of blue cheese. I grate or shred them with one-part hard cheese to two-parts "melter," and one part optional. Then I mix in a few teaspoons of a

variety of dried or fresh herbs and spices such as basil, oregano, thyme, herbs de Provence, black pepper, and granulated or fresh garlic. This blend gives the cheese a more interesting appearance and boosts the herbal flavor of the sauce.

Pizza Dough for the Big Green Egg

Makes 6 six-ounce pizza crusts

5 cups (22.5 ounces / 638 g) unbleached all-purpose flour or "00" flour

1 Tbsp (0.5 ounce / 57 g) granulated sugar

2 tsp (0.5 ounce / 57 g) kosher salt

1 tsp (.11 ounce / 3 g) instant yeast

2 Tbsp (1 ounce / 28 g) olive oil

1¾ cups (14 ounces / 397 g) room temperature water (approx. 70°F/21°C)

Method

Stir together the flour, sugar, salt, and yeast in a 4-quart bowl or the bowl of an electric mixer. With a strong metal spoon, stir in the oil and the water until the flour is all absorbed and then continue stirring to form a cohesive ball of dough. OR, mix on slow speed with the paddle attachment for one minute and then switch to the dough hook and mix on medium speed. The dough should stick to the bottom of the bowl but clear the sides of the bowl within 6 minutes of mixing. If the dough is too wet and doesn't come off the sides of the bowl sprinkle in some more flour, just until it cleans the sides.

Rub some olive oil on the counter to make an oil slick about 12-inches in diameter, and transfer the dough to the oil slick. Stretch the dough from one side and then fold it back over the top. Repeat this stretch and fold from the other side, then give the dough a quarter turn and stretch and fold it again from each

side. Flip the dough over so that the smooth side is up. The dough will feel slightly more firm to the touch but still be very supple and smooth. Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate it overnight or for up to 48 hours.

On the day you plan to make the pizzas, remove the dough from the refrigerator about 3 hours before you plan to start cooking. Generously oil a sheet pan with about 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Divide the dough into 6 equal pieces and gently round each into a ball (if the dough sticks to your hands rub your hands with a small amount of olive oil). Transfer the dough balls to a sheet pan. Mist the dough generously with oil spray and slip the pan into a food grade plastic bag or cover it loosely with plastic wrap, and leave at room temperature to slowly wake up and relax. (Note: If you want to save some of the dough for future baking you can store the dough balls in a zippered freezer bag. Dip each dough ball into a bowl that has a few tablespoon of oil in it, rolling the dough in the oil, and then put the dough into the bag—one per bag. You can place the bags into the freezer. Transfer them to the refrigerator the day before you plan to make pizza.)