

Basic Focaccia

Season: All

Makes: 30 tastes or 6 serves at home

Fresh from the garden: seasonal herbs, fruit and vegetables

Note: A focaccia is an Italian flat loaf of chewy bread with a crispy outside and a spongy centre. You can top the focaccia with seasonal herbs, fruit and vegetables from the garden. This recipe provides a tactile experience, kneading the sticky dough. Unlike other doughs, please resist the urge to add more flour during the kneading process, as the sticky dough will come together with time and persistence. The water content is important to achieve the focaccia's spongy centre and crispy outside.

EQUIPMENT

metric measuring scales, jug and spoons
bowl – 1 small, 2 large
pastry brush
2 clean tea towels
baking tray, large
baking paper
fork
chopping board
cook's knife
serving platter



INGREDIENTS

400 ml lukewarm water
1 tsp honey
3 tsp dried yeast
2 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for oiling the bowl and brushing the top of the focaccia
600 g plain white or bread flour
1 tsp salt, plus a pinch

WHAT TO DO

1. Activate the dry yeast by placing it with the water and honey in the small bowl and mixing with the fork. Leave it in a warm place for 5 to 10 minutes. It will start to look frothy as the yeast ferments the sugar into carbon dioxide.
2. Place the flour and salt into a large bowl. Create a well in the centre.
3. Add the yeast mixture into the well.
4. Use the tips of your fingers to incorporate the yeast mixture into the flour, mixing just until the dough clings together into a shaggy dough.
5. Add 1 tbsp of the olive oil over the shaggy dough. Cover the bowl with a clean tea towel and rest for 5 minutes or, preferably, overnight in the fridge.

Basic Focaccia continued

6. Form the shaggy dough into a ball and tip onto a clean, dry workbench. Start kneading with your hands flat to minimise the dough sticking to them. Knead the dough for at least 5 minutes until it can be shaped into a ball that is likely still sticky when you touch it. (The dough might become very sticky. By keeping the dough moving, the gluten in the flour will absorb the water and a tacky ball should form. Resist the urge to add more flour; if it becomes too uncomfortable, clean your hands, lightly cover them with a little oil and return to kneading the dough.)
7. Lightly oil a large bowl and place the dough in it. Drizzle 1 tbsp of oil over the top of the dough. Cover the bowl with a tea towel and leave for 15 minutes in a warm spot.
8. Using your fingers, pick the dough up from the far side of the bowl and pull it towards you, folding it into the centre of the bowl. Turn the bowl 90 degrees and repeat three more times. Turn the dough upside down. Cover the bowl with a tea towel and leave for 10 minutes in a warm spot.
9. Preheat the oven to 200°C.
10. Line a baking tray with baking paper. Tip the dough onto the baking tray. Spread the dough out into a rectangle shape that is about 2 cm thick.
11. Brush with oil to cover the dough (use up the excess oil left in the bowl or a little extra if needed).
12. Make indentations in the dough using your fingertips (so it is completely covered in indentations). Leave for 10 minutes in a warm spot.
13. Sprinkle with a pinch of salt and cover with any seasonal toppings you are using. Bake it in the oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until toppings are golden brown.
14. Remove the baking tray from the oven and allow the focaccia to cool. Cut it into slices and place it on a serving platter.

