

Making Neapolitan Style Pizza at Home

Charles Scicolone (August 13, 2009)



Pizza, Pizza and More Pizza. Confused Over Which is the Best Pizza Place? Now You Can Make Your Own Great Neapolitan Pizza at Home.

PIZZA, PIZZA, PIZZA and MORE PIZZA

Over the last month or so it seems like pizza has taken over NYC. New pizza places are opening up all over and everyone is giving their opinion and listing places that make the best pizza. The New York Times, New York Magazine and Time Out all have had their say, along with the many bloggers. Everyone has their favorite pizza place and will defend it to the last bite.



I also have my own opinion. For me, Neapolitan-style pizza is the best and Pizza Margarita is queen-- there is no king. I have three favorite pizza places. But this is not about where you can go for the best pizza; this is about making your own great pizza at home.

In 1998 Michele and I published our book *Pizza Any Way You Slice It*; it has gone through a number of printings but is now out of print. Since then, we have come up with some interesting new ideas for making great Neapolitan style pizza at home and the perfect Pizza Margarita.

Neapolitan-Style Pizza

1 teaspoon dry active yeast
Pinch of sugar
1 1/4 cups warm water
1 cup 00 flour
3 cups all purpose flour
2 teaspoons salt
Olive oil for the bowl

Equipment

The Oven

Wood burning pizza ovens in restaurants often reach 800 degrees and it will take anywhere between 45 seconds and a minute and a half to be done. Most home ovens, gas is best, only reach 550. The pizza will take longer to "bake" but this will just make it a little crispier. The oven should be heated for over an hour before it is to be used.

We have found that unglazed clay tiles work better than a pizza stone. They are more durable, cover a greater area and are easier to maintain. The tiles should be placed on a rack in the lower part of the oven.

We also now have a Hearthkit. This is a pizza stone with sides that fits in the oven. It seems to make the pizza brown better and bake faster. However it is very heavy and more expensive, but may be worth it. A wood burning oven makes great Neapolitan style pizza, if you are so lucky as to have one.

Dough or Pastry Scraper (Bench Knife)

Either plastic or metal, it is terrific for lifting sticky dough, cutting a ball of dough into smaller pieces and scraping work surfaces for easy cleanup.

Flour Dredger

A large salt shaker filled with all-purpose flour for dusting the dough and other surfaces.

Pizza Peel

A large paddle made of wood or metal, useful for sliding the pizza in and out of the oven.

Pizza Cutter or Pizza Wheel- it should have a large cutting wheel, about 4 or 5 inches in diameter.

Large Marble, Wood or Plastic Cutting Board

INGREDIENTS

Flour

Unbleached all-purpose flour

00 flour -this is the flour that they use in Naples to make pizza it is lower in protein than all-purpose flour and will make the dough easier to stretch by hand



Salt- Kosher or Sea Salt

Olive Oil - Extra Virgin

Yeast - Dry Yeast or Instant Yeast

Mozzarella

Fior di latte- as it is known in Italy is made from cow's milk. Buy it freshly made.

Mozzarella di bufala -made from the milk of water buffaloes-many pizza makers feel that this mozzarella is better appreciated on its own and not melted on pizza.

Cut the mozzarella into bit size pieces.

Tomatoes - Use fresh, very ripe tomatoes when they are in season. When they are not, use canned San Marzano tomatoes. San Marzano is not a brand name. It is a place on the slopes of Mt. Vesuvius near Naples. Beware of imposters that use the brand name San Marzano, but are really tomatoes grown somewhere else.

1Can (28 ounces) Italian peeled tomatoes

4 tablespoons olive oil

Salt

In a large saucepan, combine the tomatoes, oil, and salt to taste. Bring to a simmer.

Cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened ,15 to 20 minutes. Let the sauce cool before spreading it on the pizza dough.

THE PIZZA DOUGH

Dissolving the Yeast

Pour water into a two cup measure. Use tap water that is warm to the touch but not too warm or it will kill the yeast cells. It should be between 105 and 125 F. Sprinkle the sugar and yeast over the water and let it stand for a minute or so until the yeast begins to soften. Stir with a spoon until the yeast is dissolved.

Measuring the Flour

Dip a dry measuring cup into the bag of flour or container, sweep off the excess above the rim with the dough scraper. Do not pack the flour down. Always keep extra flour within easy reach.

Mixing the Ingredients

The ingredients can be mixed in a bowl with a mixer, with a food processor, or done by hand. Simply combine the flour with the yeast mixture and mix until it begins to form a ball.

Making the dough by hand in Italian is called fare la fontana - to make a fountain. I think it looks more like a volcano. To make it, pile the flour in a heap on a counter top. Make a depression in the top of the heap like the crater of a volcano. Pour the liquid ingredients into the crater. Incorporate the liquid into the flour very slowly using two fingers. Do it very gently so "the walls" do not break and the liquid does not escape. Do this until the inside of the crater has been incorporated, so that the liquid is not runny. As the dough starts to form and hold a shape, use the dough scraper to help lift and turn it. Mix the dough until a rough ball is formed. You may not need all of the flour. Some dry dough will remain on the board. Put the dough aside for a moment and scrape away and discard the dried up bits.

Kneading the Dough by Hand- the dough should be soft and sticky at this point. It is easier to add more flour than water and a moist, sticky dough produces a better pizza.

The purpose of kneading is to develop gluten; gluten gives the pizza structure and body.

Lightly dust the board and your hands with flour. Begin kneading by pushing the dough away from you with the heel of your hands, then pulling it back toward you with your fingertips. Repeat the motion, rotating the dough clockwise a quarter turn each time.

Add a little flour as needed to prevent sticking. The dough is ready when it looks smooth, satiny and



feels moist. Not dry and floury. It should take 2 minutes if a food processor is used and 10 minutes if kneaded by hand.

Shaping the Dough into a Ball- Hold your hands out in front of you, palms up and fingers together. Place your hands to each side and under the ball. Tuck the dough under, with your insides of your hand, stretching the outer surface smooth. Move the hands back and forth, rotating the ball clockwise.





Rising the Dough - To rise the dough on a counter top. Sprinkle a little flour on the counter top and place the dough seam side down. Cover the dough completely with a large overturned bowl or plastic wrap. The dough should not be exposed to the air.

To rise the dough in a bowl. Put a few drops of olive oil in the bowl; place the dough upside down in the bowl. Then turn the ball so as to oil it and place the seam side down.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Leave the dough to rise at cool room temperature. The longer and slower the rise, the more flavorful the dough. When the dough has risen (about double in size) cut it into four pieces and shape into four balls. Let rise again.

Shaping the dough by hand- Lightly flour the work surface. Keeping the other pieces covered, place 1 ball of dough on the surface, turning it over to flour the top. Holding your fingers flat, press the dough into a disk. Continue turning it, and making it larger. The border should remain slightly thicker than the center. Lift and turn the dough over from time to time. Handle it gently and work slowly to avoid tearing the dough. As it nears its desired dimensions (9-10 inches), drape the circle of dough over your closed fists. Move your hands up and down tugging the dough and stretching it evenly. If the dough does tear, pinch it together to seal.





Baking the Pizza – Dust the pizza peel with flour. Place the shaped dough on the peel. Shake the peel two or three times to make sure the dough is not sticking. If it is, lift the dough and sprinkle the peel with more flour. Quickly spread the sauce (it should be room temperature) to within a 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch from the conicione, the edge, and add the mozzarella (you can also bake the pie for a minute or two and then add the mozzarella). Do not use too much sauce or it will make the dough heavy and stick to the peel. Do not leave the dough sitting on the peel or it may stick.



Open the oven door and sprinkle a little flour on the tiles to help the bottom of the pizza brown. Slide the peel into the oven. Place the front end of the peel at the end of the oven, tilt it and gently slide the pizza off. Quickly close the door, it should take about 6 minutes to be ready. Check the pizza and when you think it is done take it out. If the dough came off the peel misshapen, do not worry about it, it will still taste good. Slide the peel or a large metal spatula under the pizza, remove it from the oven, place it on a cutting board. Sprinkle with some torn fresh basil and a drizzle of olive oil. Cut it into wedges with a pizza wheel. Eat and drink with wine.



Making pizza is not an exact science-if it something does not look or feel right, do whatever it takes to make it work! And practice, practice, practice!



Source URL: <http://test.iitaly.org/magazine/dining-in-out/articles-reviews/article/making-neapolitan-style-pizza-home>

Links

[1] <http://test.iitaly.org/files/10442pizza-tour-shaping-dough1249828337jpg>