

Focaccio Bread

New York Times - Seasoned with little more than olive oil and crunchy sea salt, focaccia is an ancient flatbread that is unexpectedly easy to make. Once a staple at Caroline Fidanza's now-closed sandwich shop, Saltie, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, this recipe from the "Saltie: A Cookbook" is perfect on its own, but also serves as a base upon which you can experiment.

Yield: 1 - 9x13 loaf

Ingredients:

3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour 415 grams
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon active, dry yeast
1 3/4 cups warm water
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil plus more for greasing
1 1/2 teaspoons coarse seasalt
whole or chopped herb or other vegetables for garnish



Directions:

Step 1 - In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, kosher salt and yeast. Add the warm water to the flour mixture and stir until all the flour is incorporated and a sticky dough forms. (No kneading required.) Pour 2 tablespoons oil into a medium bowl. Transfer the dough to the bowl, turn to coat, and cover tightly with a lid or plastic wrap. Place in the refrigerator to rest for at least 24 hours or for up to 2 days.

Step 2 - When you're ready to bake, brush the inside of a 9-by-13-inch baking sheet with oil. Remove the dough from the refrigerator and transfer to the prepared pan. Using your hands, spread the dough out as much as possible, adding oil to the dough if needed to keep it from sticking. (Don't worry if the dough doesn't yet cover the full pan; it will once it relaxes and rises.) Place the dough in a warm place and let rise until about doubled in bulk. The rising time will vary considerably depending on the season. When the dough is ready, it should be room temperature, spread out on the sheet and fluffy.

Step 3 - Heat the oven to 450 degrees. Using your palms, pat down the focaccia to an even thickness of about 1 inch, then, using your fingertips, dimple the entire dough. Drizzle it with the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil. Sprinkle the entire surface of the focaccia evenly with the sea salt and herbs, if using.

Step 4 - Bake, rotating once front to back, until the top is uniformly golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer the focaccia on the baking sheet to a wire rack to cool, then slide out of the pan. Enjoy it hot. (Focaccia deteriorates in quality after the first day. If there is some left over, wrap it tightly in plastic and store at room temperature for another day. Day-old focaccia is delicious in soup.)

Tip: To make a focaccia garden, prepare your vegetables as the dough rises in Step 2. Be creative in working with what you have: Peppers make great petals. Tomatoes do, too, but you might want to drain them before you put them on the dough. Chives and scallions make great stems. Experiment with olives and seeds, purple potatoes, and red onions. Whatever your fancy, cut your decorations a little thick, about 1/8 an inch, and dip any fresh herbs in lemon water to keep the colors vibrant as they bake. Arrange the vegetables over the focaccia after you dimple the dough in Step 3. Press them into the dough gently, then drizzle with the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, and proceed with the rest of the recipe.