

## BIANCO PIZZA DOUGH

This dough contains just four ingredients: water, flour, yeast, and salt. Let's consider each one in turn. Before you make the dough for the first time, I want you to pour yourself a glass of the water you'll be using and drink it. I want you to really taste it. It is going to rehydrate the flour, and its warmth will bring the yeast back to life. Ask yourself how salty it is, how sweet it is. Record your observations.

Now think about the flour. What kind are you going to use? I like one that is high in protein, because it gives the finished crust a good chew. If you're lucky enough to have a good mill near where you live, pay them a visit and ask them about their flour. The flour is the biggest single factor in the flavor of your dough, so it's something that you don't want to compromise on.

Now the yeast. Yeast is life. Yeast is what makes bread different from everything else we eat. Here, for ease, I use active dry yeast. As you experiment, you may want to try fresh yeast, but active dry yeast will give you a good result.

And last, salt. Salt is flavor. It's rare to see someone muck up a bread with too much salt. If anything, I find a lot of bread is insipid because it lacks salt. Pick a fine, not coarse, salt you like.

## INGREDIENTS

*Makes enough for 4, 10-inch pizzas.*

1 envelope active dry yeast (2¼ teaspoons)

2 cups warm water (105° to 110°F)

5 to 5½ cups bread, or other high-protein, flour preferably organic and freshly milled, plus more for dusting

2 teaspoons fine sea salt, extra virgin olive oil, for greasing the bowl

## DIRECTIONS

Combine the yeast and warm water in a large bowl. Give the yeast a stir to help dissolve it, and let it do its thing for 5 minutes. You're giving it a little bit of a kick-start, giving it some room to activate, to breathe.



When the yeast has dissolved, stir in 3 cups of the flour, mixing gently until smooth. You're letting the flour marry the yeast. Slowly add 2 cups more flour, working it in gently. You should be able to smell the yeast working— that happy yeast-y smell. Add the salt. (If you add the salt earlier, it could inhibit the yeast's growth.) If necessary, add up to ½ cup more flour 1 tablespoon at a time, stirring until the dough comes away from the bowl but is still sticky.

Turn the dough out onto a floured work surface and get to work. Slap the dough onto the counter, pulling it toward you with one hand while pushing it away with the other, stretching it and folding it back on itself. Repeat the process until the dough is noticeably easier to handle, 10 to 15 times, then knead until it's smooth and stretchy, soft, and still a little tacky. This should take about 10 minutes, but here, feel is everything. (One of the most invaluable tools I have in my kitchen is a plastic dough scraper. It costs next to nothing, and it allows me to make sure that no piece of dough is left behind.)

Shape the dough into a ball and put it in a lightly greased big bowl. Roll the dough around to coat it with oil, then cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the dough rest in a warm place until it doubles in size, 2 to 2½ hours. When you press the fully proofed dough with your finger, the indentation should remain.

Turn the proofed dough out onto a floured work surface and cut it into 4 pieces. Roll the pieces into balls and dust them with flour. Cover with plastic wrap and let them rest for another hour, or until they have doubled in size.

The dough is ready to be shaped, topped, and baked. If you don't want to make 4 pizzas at a time, the dough balls can be wrapped well and refrigerated for up 8 hours or frozen for up to 3 weeks; thaw in the refrigerator and let come to room temperature before proceeding.

## **SHAPING PIZZA DOUGH**

Hold the top edge of a piece of dough with both hands, allowing the bottom edge to touch the work surface, and carefully move your hands around the edges to form a round of dough. You have to find your own style, but I usually just cup my hand into a C shape, turn my hand knuckle side up, and drape the dough off it, allowing gravity to do its work, so it gently falls onto the floured table. Imagine you're turning a wheel. Hold that dough aloft, allowing its weight to stretch it into a rough 10-inch round. Don't put any pressure on it by pulling or stretching it, just let gravity do the job — you want that aeration and craginess. Keep it moving, and it will start to relax — like we relax when we are on a sofa.

At this point, you're ready to make a pizza. Lay the dough on a lightly floured pizza peel or inverted baking sheet. Gently press out the edges with your fingers. You will start to see some puffiness or bubbles now. Jerk the peel to make sure the dough is not sticking. If it is, lift the dough and dust the underside with a little flour (or, if no one is looking, blow under it very gently). Tuck and shape it until it's a happy round.

Top the pizza as per the instructions in any of the recipes that follow.

## PROOFING DOUGH

In the Bianco Pizza Dough recipe, you proof the dough for 3 hours, then divide it into balls and let it proof for another hour before you bake it. It tastes good. No problems. But what happens if you proof it for 7 hours? What if you let it go for 24 hours? It will be different, and that difference might be more to your taste than the basic dough. At 3 hours for the first proof, you will have a dough that will brown more quickly than a dough that's proofed for 14 hours, because the yeast will not have converted as many of the sugars. The longer the dough proofs, and the more sugars are converted, the more it will have that alcoholic smell of fermentation, and the more the sour flavors will develop. Many people love those flavors — I like a good sourdough bread — but here I don't necessarily want too many of them, because I don't want them to dominate the flavors of the pizza toppings. That said, there is no wrong way to go here. Make the dough a few times, following the recipe, until you feel comfortable. Then start to play with it. Determine how long a proof you like.

Bear in mind that where you are in the world will also play its part. If you're making the dough in Iceland, it's going to be different from making it in Phoenix. The climate is different, so it may need to proof for a little longer than 3 hours to start. Your water will be different, and it will affect the flavor of your dough. Never forget, we're only dealing with four ingredients, and each one brings its own flavors and qualities to the pizza. So record the process as you go. Work with your sense of taste and your broader sensibility of the things you like. This basic dough recipe is only an early survey of a journey you get to finish yourself.



## FOCACCIA

You could also call this Sicilian pizza or pizza al taglio or grandma pie — it can be any of those. Even the name “grandma pie” makes me happy, because it makes me think of a grandma in Topeka or Chicago, someone who doesn’t have a wood-burning oven and makes pizza in a pan because she’s busy. But here I wanted to evoke a version of the Sicilian pizza I loved growing up in New York. Sicilian pie wasn’t an everyday thing. It was bigger than life. It was rare

to see it available as slices. I loved the crust, the crispy oiliness of it, the crunchy bottom that gave way to an airy, springy center and a tender, yielding top. Sicilian pizza always felt celebratory.

This is the same dough we use to make pizza, but it is given a slightly longer proofing time after the first rise. We also use this focaccia, without any topping other than coarse salt and maybe some rosemary leaves, for our sandwiches.

### INGREDIENTS

*Makes 9 large pieces for sandwiches or 12 smaller pieces.*

Bianco Pizza Dough, taken through the 3-hour rise

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

Coarse sea salt (optional)

Chopped fresh rosemary or another topping of your choice

### DIRECTIONS

After the dough has proofed for a minimum of 3 hours, put it on a large rimmed baking sheet and drizzle the oil over it, turning to coat. Then flatten and press the dough out into a rectangle (it won’t fill the pan entirely at this point). Cover with plastic wrap and let proof for 1½ hours in a warm place. When the dough has fully proofed, it will have absorbed some of the oil, will have stretched to fit the pan snugly, and will look alive, almost bubbling.

Meanwhile, about an hour before the dough has finished proofing, preheat the oven to its highest setting.

Using two fingers, make even indentations in rows up and down the surface of the dough, leaving a 1-inch border all around. At this point, you can just sprinkle it with some sea salt and, if you like, fresh rosemary leaves and bake it as directed (that is the version we use for our sandwiches) or you can use one of the toppings that follow. The choice is yours.

# LEMON, PECORINO AND RED ONION TOPPING

## INGREDIENTS

*Makes enough for 1 focaccia.*

½ pound young pecorino or Manchego, thinly shaved

Lemons, sliced into paper-thin rounds and seeds removed

½ red onion, very thinly sliced into rings

Leaves from 1 rosemary sprig

¼ teaspoon fine sea salt

Extra virgin olive oil, for drizzling

## DIRECTIONS

Scatter the pecorino over the dough, leaving a 1-inch border all around. Arrange the lemon slices evenly over the pecorino and follow with the onion slices. Sprinkle the rosemary over the top and season with the salt. Finish with a few good lashes of olive oil.

Transfer the pan to the oven and bake for 15 minutes. Rotate the pan front to back and bake for about 15 minutes more, until the lemons and dough are golden brown. Remove the focaccia from the pan, transfer to a wire rack, and cool for at least 10 minutes. Cut into squares and serve warm.

