

Serious Eats: Recipes

Cook the Book: Pan Pizza

Posted by Caroline Russock, February 8, 2010

"Starting with the pre-ferment gives you a dough that's more resilient than most make-at-home pizza crusts."



[Photograph: Caroline Russock]

Homemade pizza is something that I try my hand at fairly frequently and although it's never bad, many times the dough isn't exactly where I want it to be. I suppose that I just hadn't found **the ideal pizza dough recipe** until I came across the **Pan Pizza** from [The Grand Central Baking Book](#). It's really one of the best dough recipes I've tried in a while.

This dough is a thick-crust base that can stand up to a lot of toppings, similar to a Sicilian-style. The dough has a lightness that belies its dense look, which comes from a technique that was new to me, at least as far as pizza is concerned—**the pre-ferment**.

Basically you mix yeast, water, and flour and let it sit for an hour. After it bubbles up into a starter, you mix it in with the rest of the ingredients for the dough, a little more yeast, olive oil, salt and flour. The dough is kneaded and left to rise again for another hour.

Starting with the pre-ferment gives you a dough that's more resilient than most make-at-home pizza crusts. **It's pliant and easy to work with** so you don't have to worry about using an light touch to stretch the crust, for fear of tearing.

I wasn't sure what kind of dough this recipe was going to produce so I left my topping options open until I had a feel for what the dough could handle. Once the dough was situated in the pan I realized **it was dense enough to**

stand up to heavy Chicago-style toppings, like cheese on the bottom, followed by sausage and dollops of sauce.

I layered on the cheese, pressed in little lumps of fresh homemade sausage, dolloped the sauce on top, and finished the whole thing with a grating of Parmesan. I placed it in the oven and 40 minutes later my pizza was finished, golden brown and bubbling.

The pizza was a hybrid of Sicilian and Chicago styles, the oils from the cheese and sausage permeated and flavored the dough but the bottom stayed crisp enough that the square slices didn't buckle under the weight of the topping.

It was **definitely one of the best pizzas that has ever emerged from my oven** thanks mostly to the incredible dough. I suppose that my only regret would be I didn't invite a slew of hungry friends over for dinner since the pizza could easily feed six or more.

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As always with our Cook the Book feature, we have five (5) copies of *The Grand Central Baking Book* to give away this week. [Enter to win here »](#)

Pan Pizza

- makes one 8 by 12-inch pizza -

Adapted from [The Grand Central Baking Book](#) by Piper Davis and Ellen Jackson.

Ingredients

Pre-ferment

1 1/3 cups (7 ounces) high-gluten bread flour
1 cup (8 fluid ounces) tepid water (about 80°F)
2 teaspoons dry active yeast

4 cups (1 pound, 5 ounces) high-gluten bread flour

11/4 cups (10 fluid ounces) tepid water (about 80°F)

3 tablespoons olive oil

2 teaspoons dry active yeast

1 tablespoon salt

Procedure

- 1. Mix the pre-ferment: Measure the flour, water, and yeast into a bowl with high sides and whisk or beat until smooth. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and ferment for one hour before adding ingredients for the final dough.**
- 2. Mix the final dough and let it rise: Combine the pre-ferment, flour, water, olive oil, yeast, and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook attachment. Mix on low speed for 3 minutes. Stop the mixer and run a plastic bowl scraper or a rubber spatula around the sides of the bowl to loosen the dough and bring it to the center, then switch to medium-high speed for 5 minutes.**
- 3. Let the dough rise: Generously coat a clean bowl with olive oil, then scrape the dough from the mixer into the oiled bowl using a plastic bowl scraper. Cover with plastic wrap and let the dough rise in a warm**

place (at least 75°F) for 1 hour, until doubled in size.

4. Preform the dough: Generously dust a work surface with flour. Scrape the dough out of the bowl onto the work surface and gently tug it into a rectangular shape measuring about 8 by 10 inches. Cover with plastic wrap and let rest for 15 minutes to allow the dough to relax and stretch easily into a large rectangle that fits nicely into the baking sheet.

5. Fit the dough into the pan: Liberally oil a 12 by 18-inch rimmed baking sheet. Transfer the dough to the prepared pan, then tug and pull the dough into the corners and up the sides of the pan, stretching it from the middle as well as the sides. It takes some practice to stretch the dough evenly over the large baking sheet. Ideally, you'll be able to cover the entire pan without creating holes or extremely thin spots. If the dough wants to spring back to its original shape, let it rest for 5 to 10 minutes. Be patient--this skill is developed over time, with practice. If you make a hole in the dough, patch it with a small piece of dough from a thicker area. Above all, resist the urge to ball up the dough and start over.

6. Top and bake the pizza: Preheat oven to 450°F. Use a light hand to top the pizza. (It's less important with a pan pizza since the crust is a bit thicker.) Begin with a layer of sauce followed by a liberal covering of grated cheese. Finish with the meat and/or vegetables and some additional cheese, if desired. You should still be able to see the various toppings when you've finished. That is, the sauce should show through the cheese layer, and the cheese shouldn't be covered entirely by the next layer of toppings. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, rotating the pan once, until the crust is brown and crispy and the cheese is bubbling.

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