

Place a pizza stone or unglazed tiles on the bottom rack of the oven and preheat to 500°F.

Lightly flour the work surface. Place 1 of the dough balls on the work surface, leaving the others under the damp towel. Punch down and flatten into a disk. Turn the disk over, sprinkle with additional flour and, using a rolling pin or your hands, roll out or stretch the dough into a 12-inch round, turning it over and dusting it regularly with flour as you work.

Sprinkle a baker's peel or rimless baking sheet with semolina flour. Gently lay the dough round on top. Cover evenly with one-fourth of the tomatoes or tomato puree and drizzle with 1 Tbs. of the remaining olive oil. Slide the pizza onto the baking stone or tiles and bake until the crust begins to brown, about 5 minutes. Scatter one-fourth of the cheese and bell pepper strips over the top and add 3 of the anchovy fillets. Continue to bake until the cheese is melted and the crust is browned and crisp, about 5 minutes more. Begin assembling the other 3 pizzas while the first one is baking.

Remove the first pizza from the oven and serve immediately. Bake the remaining pizzas in the same way. Makes four 12-inch pizzas; serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Foods of the World Series, *Rome*, by Maureen B. Fant (Oxmoor House, 2005).

Roman-Style Pizza with Spinach and Olives (Pizza al Taglio con Spinaci)

Pizza al taglio translates to pizza by the slice, and in Rome it is a perennially popular street food. The pizzas are baked in large rectangular trays and sold by weight. Toppings can run the gamut, but fresh spinach and olives make a great combination.

Preheat an oven to 500°F. Lightly oil a 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheet.

In a bowl, stir together the tomatoes, garlic, basil, salt and 2 Tbs. of the olive oil. Let stand at room temperature for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour. Remove the garlic and discard.

In a large fry pan over medium heat, warm the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil. Add the spinach and, using tongs, turn to coat the leaves with the oil. Sauté just until barely wilted, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside.

Using your hands or a rolling pin, roll and stretch out the pizza dough on a lightly floured work surface and fit it into the prepared pan. Spoon the raw tomato sauce over the top, leaving a 1-inch border. Arrange the mozzarella slices, onion, spinach and olives on top of the sauce. Bake until the cheese is bubbly and the crust is golden brown and crisped around the edges, about 15 minutes. Let rest for 5 minutes, then cut into rectangles and serve hot. Serves 4 to 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Rustic Italian*, by Domenica Marchetti (Weldon Owen, 2011).

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Italian Flours

Italians classify their flour as 1, 0 or 00, which refers to how finely milled it is and how much of the husk and grain of the wheat have been removed.

Using a Pizza Peel

- A pizza peel makes for mishap-free transfer of pizzas to and from a baking stone.
- Scatter semolina or all-purpose flour onto the pizza peel.
- Gently lay a rolled-out round of pizza dough on the peel and add the desired toppings.
- Use the peel to slide the pizza onto the stone, quickly yanking the peel backwards to remove it. After baking the pizza, slip the peel under the crust and transfer the pizza to a cutting board. Cut the pizza into slices and enjoy.

Pizza Stones

Also called a baking stone or baking tile, this square, rectangular or round slab of unglazed stoneware creates the effect of a brick oven in a home oven. Preheat the stone in the oven for at least 45 minutes or up to 1 hour before baking. Then slide the pizza onto the hot stone using a pizza peel.

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Ingredients for Roman-Style Pizza with Spinach and Olives (Pizza al Taglio con Spinaci)

3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for greasing

1½ cups canned diced tomatoes

2 garlic cloves, crushed flat but left whole

5 fresh basil leaves, shredded

¼ tsp. fine sea salt

6 oz. fresh spinach leaves

1 batch pizza dough

Semolina flour or unbleached all-purpose flour for dusting

12 oz. fresh mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced

½ cup thinly sliced red onion

¾ cup pitted Gaeta or Kalamata olives, halved lengthwise

Ingredients for Food-Processor Pizza Dough

1 Tbs. active dry yeast

1 tsp. sugar

1 cup warm water (105° to 115°F)

3 cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp. salt

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

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Technique Class: Pizza—It's All About the Crust!

In the relatively rigid program that represents the Italian gastronomic day or week, pizza is usually the main item in a light sit-down meal served in a dedicated pizzeria. It is usually washed down with beer, soda or a light white wine and may be preceded by bruschetta, *suppli*, deep-fried salt-cod fillets or other snacks, usually fried. When the pizzeria also serves other dishes, the pizza may be treated as a *primo piatto*, that is, a substitute for pasta or soup.

On Sunday evenings, Rome's pizzerias are filled with families. The rest of the week, the customers tend to be young people who want to *stare insieme* (pass the time together), or groups of adults who want an evening out that is not *impegnativo* (a big commitment).

The best pizzas come from wood-burning ovens, which are rarely fired up before dark in Rome's warm climate, making it easier to find a pizza for dinner than for lunch. The Roman crust is thin and fairly crisp, though tender enough to be eaten—as is proper—with knife and fork. The border is narrow and low. As with pasta, the crust should not be viewed as merely a vehicle for the topping. A naked pizza—the Roman focaccia—drizzled with olive oil and perhaps adorned with some diced tomatoes or a slice or two of prosciutto, is proof of that.

The yeasty Neapolitan crust, with its wide, high border, has been making inroads in Rome, but this is probably the only identifiably external influence. Pizza toppings include old classics, new classics and idiosyncrasies of individual pizzerias. Pies topped with *mozzarella di bufala* and Pachino tomatoes (prized cherry tomatoes from southeastern Sicily), *fiori di zucca* (zucchini flowers) or *rughetta* (arugula) have joined *pizza alla napoletana* (anchovies, tomatoes and mozzarella), *pizza ai funghi* (fresh mushrooms, tomatoes and mozzarella) and pizza Margherita (tomatoes, mozzarella and sometimes basil) as near-universal menu items.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Foods of the World Series, *Rome*, by Maureen B. Fant (Oxmoor House, 2005).

Food-Processor Pizza Dough

Mixed in a food processor, this dough comes together quickly. Be sure to check the expiration date on the yeast; if it is outdated, the dough will not rise properly.

In a small bowl, dissolve the yeast and sugar in the warm water and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes.

In the bowl of a food processor fitted with the dough blade, combine the flour and salt and process with 3 or 4 pulses. With the motor running on the dough speed, slowly add the yeast mixture, allowing each addition to be absorbed before

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adding more. Continue processing until the dough forms a ball and cleans the sides of the bowl, about 1 minute, then process for 1 minute more.

Coat the inside of a large bowl with the olive oil and place the dough in the bowl. Cover with a clean kitchen towel and let the dough rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1½ hours. Divide the dough in half and roll out as directed in the pizza recipe. Makes two 12-inch rounds.

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Bread-Machine Pizza Dough

This pizza dough couldn't be easier to prepare. Just combine the ingredients in a bread machine and process as directed. The recipe makes enough dough for two 12-inch pizzas. Be sure to use fresh yeast (check the expiration date on the package); otherwise, the dough won't rise properly.

In the bread pan of an electric bread machine, combine (in this order) the warm water, olive oil, salt, flour and yeast. Set the machine for Pizza Dough according to the manufacturer's instructions and process through the cycle.

Transfer the dough to a lightly floured work surface. Punch down the dough and divide in half. Form each half into a ball and cover with a clean kitchen towel. Let the dough rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 40 minutes. Roll out as directed in the pizza recipe. Makes two 12-inch rounds.

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Pizza Margherita

To make the dough, on a wooden or marble work surface, mix together the flour and salt. Shape the flour into a mound and then make a well in the middle. Place the yeast and warm water in the center of the well.

Using your fingers, mix the flour a little at a time into the well until all of it is incorporated. Then knead the dough vigorously with your hands until it is soft and smooth, 15 to 20 minutes.

Alternatively, in the bowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer fitted with the dough hook, mix together the salt and flour on low speed until well combined. Add the yeast and warm water and mix until all the flour is hydrated. Let the dough rest for 2 minutes, then turn the mixer on again and knead the dough on low speed until it reaches a soft, smooth consistency, 8 to 10 minutes.

Once you have the right consistency (add a little more flour or water if necessary), shape the dough into a ball on your work surface and cover with a bowl, lightly misted with oil, to prevent the dough from drying out. Let the dough rise at room temperature until doubled in size, 3 to 4 hours. Divide the dough into 6 equal pieces and shape each into a disk. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature until doubled in size again, 2 to 3 hours.

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Preheat an oven to 450°F.

Using a blender or an immersion blender, blend the canned tomatoes with 2 Tbs. of the olive oil and a pinch of salt until a chunky sauce forms. If using fresh tomatoes, in a bowl, gently toss them with 2 Tbs. of the olive oil and a pinch of salt.

To shape the crust, using your fingers and a little extra-virgin olive oil, knead the dough slightly and then flatten it out into the desired shape and thickness. Drizzle a little olive oil over the dough, then using a ladle or a spoon, cover the dough with one-sixth of the tomato sauce. If using fresh tomatoes, arrange one-sixth of the slices to cover the bottom of the dough. Cover with one-sixth of the cheese and garnish with basil leaves.

Bake the pizza until the cheese is bubbly and the crust is browned on the edges, 6 to 8 minutes. Remove the pizza from the oven and garnish with more basil leaves and a drizzle of olive oil. Season with salt and pepper, if desired. Serve immediately. Repeat with the remaining ingredients to make 5 more pizzas. Serves 6.

Pizza with Roasted Peppers, Tomatoes and Anchovies (Pizza con Peperoni, Pomodori e Alici)

To make the dough, in a small bowl, stir the yeast into the 2 Tbs. lukewarm water. Let stand until creamy, about 3 minutes.

On a large work surface, sift together the all-purpose flour, semolina flour and salt into a mound, then make a well in the center. Pour the yeast mixture, olive oil and ¼ cup of the lukewarm water into the well. Using your fingers or a fork, swirl the liquid in a circular motion, gradually incorporating flour from the sides. Slowly add the remaining 1 cup lukewarm water to the well at the same time, until the ingredients are well combined and a rough dough has formed. Knead vigorously, stretching and pressing the dough against the work surface until it is soft and smooth and comes away cleanly from your hands, about 10 minutes. To check if the dough is sufficiently kneaded, cut off a piece; the cut surface should be pocked with small air holes.

Cover the dough with a damp kitchen towel and let rest for 5 minutes. Then divide the dough into 4 balls, cover again and let rise at room temperature until doubled in volume, about 2 hours.

To prepare the topping, if using fresh tomatoes, preheat an oven to 350°F. Put the tomatoes in a single layer in a roasting pan. Drizzle with 2 Tbs. of the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast until soft and shriveled, 45 to 50 minutes. Set aside.

Preheat the broiler. Arrange the bell peppers on a pan and place under the broiler about 6 inches from the heat source. Broil, turning as needed, until the skin is blistered and charred, 10 to 15 minutes; watch carefully to avoid burning the flesh. Transfer the peppers to a paper bag, close the top and set aside until cool. Cut off the stems and pull off the charred skins. Slit each pepper open lengthwise, remove and discard the seeds and ribs, and cut lengthwise into strips ⅜ inch wide. Set aside.

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Ingredients for Pizza with Roasted Peppers, Tomatoes and Anchovies (Pizza con Peperoni, Pomodori e Alici)

For the dough:

1¼ tsp. active dry yeast

2 Tbs. plus 1¼ cups lukewarm water

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 cups semolina flour, plus more as needed

½ tsp. salt

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

For the topping:

1 lb. cherry tomatoes, left whole, or ¾ cup canned plum tomato puree

6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

2 red bell peppers

1 lb. fresh mozzarella cheese, shredded or sliced, well drained and blotted dry

12 olive oil-packed anchovy fillets