

Focaccia with Olives and Tomatoes

Serves 8

Adapted from the *Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking* by Marcella Hazan

Hazan's recipe for the focaccia leaves little to be desired and I've adapted it minimally to use just a tad less flour. I save my creativity for the toppings.

For the dough:

1 package active dry yeast

2 cups lukewarm water

6 cups all purpose flour (preferably unbleached), more if needed

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon salt

2 tablespoons olive oil

Special equipment: 1 large baking sheet (preferably dark in color), 1 large baking (pizza) stone

For the topping:

1 cup halved grape tomatoes

¼ cup pitted and chopped black oil-cured olives

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons water

½ teaspoon salt

Combine the yeast with ½ cup lukewarm water in a small bowl. Let sit until yeast begins to foam (usually no more than 10 minutes). Once foaming, combine the yeast and water mixture with 1 cup of flour in a bowl. Stir until the dough is shaggy and then stir in an additional 3 cups of flour, 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, the salt and ¾ cup lukewarm water. Stir with a rubber spatula until ingredients are combined and the dough is shaggy again. Add the remaining ¾ cup water and the remaining 2 cups of flour. Stir until the dough comes together. The dough should be soft, but not too sticky.

Remove the dough from the bowl. Slap the dough onto the countertop several times until it stretches out lengthwise into a long roll. If dough seems too sticky, dust it lightly with additional flour. Starting with the end farthest from you, pull the end of the dough back towards itself and use your palm to knead it. Repeat until you've brought the dough back to you and have a roughly shaped dough ball. Continue to knead the dough in this manner for about 8 minutes until the dough is smooth and pliant.

Spread the 2 tablespoons olive oil over the baking sheet and place the round of dough on it. Cover with a damp towel and let rise in a warm place until doubled in size (about 1 hour).

After the dough has risen, gently press it down and stretch it until it completely covers the baking sheet. Cover the dough with the damp towel and let rest for another 30 minutes.

Immediately after preparing the dough place a baking stone on a rack in the top-third of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees.

When the dough has finished resting for the second time use the tips of your fingers to dimple the dough (simple press down repeatedly until the dough is covered with shallow indentations). In a small bowl, whisk together the $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra virgin olive oil, the water, and salt until the salt dissolves. Drizzle the mixture over the dough and use a brush to make sure the entire surface is covered. The mixture will pool in the indentations – this is a good thing. Scatter the tomatoes and olives over the bread and gently press them into the dough. If you are slightly obsessive like me, you may want to make sure that all of the tomatoes are facing the same way.

Place the baking sheet atop the preheated baking stone. Bake for 8 minutes then rotate the bread and cook for another 8 minutes. Remove from the oven if golden brown; otherwise, continue cooking for a few more minutes. Allow to cool for at least 20 minutes before slicing and serving. Focaccia is best on the day it is made although I never throw it away and find that it makes great sandwiches.