

Rosemary Focaccia

From the episode: *Simply Italian*

Makes two 9-inch round loaves

If you don't have a baking stone, bake the bread on an overturned, preheated rimmed baking sheet set on the upper-middle oven rack. The bread can be kept for up to 2 days well wrapped at room temperature or frozen for 2 months wrapped in foil and placed in a zipper-lock bag.

INGREDIENTS

BIGA

- 1/2** cup (2 1/2 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1/3** cup (2 2/3 ounces) warm water (100-110 degrees F)
- 1/4** teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast

DOUGH

- 2 1/2** cups (12 1/2 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour , plus extra for shaping
- 1 1/4** cups (10 ounces) warm water (100-110 degrees F)
- 1** teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast
- Kosher salt
- 4** tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2** tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary

INSTRUCTIONS

1. FOR THE BIGA: Combine flour, water, and yeast in large bowl and stir with wooden spoon until uniform mass forms and no dry flour remains, about 1 minute. Cover bowl tightly with plastic wrap and let stand at room temperature (about 70 degrees) overnight (at least 8 hours and up to 24 hours.) Use immediately or store in refrigerator for up to 3 days (allow to stand at room temperature 30 minutes before proceeding with recipe.)

2. FOR THE DOUGH: Stir flour, water, and yeast into biga with wooden spoon until uniform mass forms and no dry flour remains, about 1 minute. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature for 15 minutes.

3. Sprinkle 2 teaspoons salt over dough; stir into dough until thoroughly incorporated, about 1 minute. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature 30 minutes. Spray rubber spatula or bowl scraper with nonstick cooking spray; fold partially risen dough over itself by gently lifting and folding edge of dough toward middle. Turn bowl 90 degrees; fold again. Turn bowl and fold dough 6 more times (total of 8 turns). Cover with plastic wrap and let rise for 30 minutes. Repeat folding, turning, and rising 2 more times, for total of three 30-minute rises. Meanwhile, adjust oven rack to upper-middle position, place baking stone on rack, and heat oven to 500 degrees at least 30 minutes before baking.

4. Gently transfer dough to lightly floured counter. Lightly dust top of dough with flour and divide in half. Shape each piece of dough into 5-inch round by gently tucking under edges. Coat two 9-inch round cake pans with 2 tablespoons olive oil each. Sprinkle each pan with ½ teaspoon kosher salt. Place round of dough in pan, top side down; slide dough around pan to coat bottom and sides, then flip over. Repeat with second piece of dough. Cover pans with plastic wrap and let rest for 5 minutes.

5. Using fingertips, press dough out toward edges of pan. (If dough resists stretching, let it relax for 5 to 10 minutes before trying again.) Using dinner fork, poke surface of dough 25 to 30 times, popping any large bubbles. Sprinkle rosemary evenly over top of dough. Let dough rest until slightly bubbly, 5 to 10 minutes.

6. Place pans on baking stone and reduce oven temperature to 450 degrees. Bake until tops are golden brown, 25 to 28 minutes, switching placement of pans halfway through baking. Transfer pans to wire rack and let cool 5 minutes. Remove loaves from pan and return to wire rack. Brush tops with any oil remaining in pan. Let cool 30 minutes before serving.

TECHNIQUE

HOLD THE SALT—TEMPORARILY

Instead of relying on kneading to develop gluten, our dough uses a resting process called autolysis. During this long resting period (which usually lasts several hours), enzymes in the wheat cut long, balled-up strands of gluten into smaller pieces, which then unravel and link together to form larger, well-developed gluten networks. Could adjusting when we added salt to the dough help speed things along?

THE EXPERIMENT

We prepared two doughs. In the first, we combined the flour, water, yeast, and salt with the biga all at once before resting; in the second, we withheld the salt for 15 minutes.

THE RESULTS

Briefly omitting the salt hastened gluten development by an hour. After just 15 minutes, the unsalted dough was already pliant and smooth, while the salted dough was still gluey and stiff.

THE EXPLANATION

Salt inhibits both the ability of flour to absorb water and the activity of the enzymes that break down proteins to begin the process of forming gluten. If allowed to rest without salt, the flour is able to get a jump on gluten development by absorbing as much water as it can and letting its enzymes work sooner to develop gluten networks.

15-MINUTE REST, WITH SALT

Dough is sticky and stiff.



15-MINUTE REST, WITHOUT SALT

Dough is supple and smooth.



TECHNIQUE

HOW TO MAKE AIRY, FLAVORFUL NO-KNEAD FOCACCIA

1. MAKE DOUGH

Stir flour, water, and yeast into biga with wooden spoon until uniform mass forms and no dry flour remains, about 1 minute.



2. LET RISE 15 MINUTES

Cover with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature 15 minutes.



3. ADD SALT

Stir salt into dough until thoroughly incorporated, about 1 minute.



4. LET RISE 30 MINUTES

Cover with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature 30 minutes.



5. FOLD AND TURN

Gently lift and fold edge of dough toward middle. Turn bowl 90 degrees; fold again. Repeat for total of eight turns.



6. LET RISE AND REPEAT

Cover with plastic wrap and let rise 30 minutes. Repeat folding, turning, and rising two more times, for total of three 30-minute rises.



7. DIVIDE, SHAPE, OIL

Divide dough in half and gently shape halves into rounds. Place in oiled, salted pans, then coat with oil and salt and flip. Cover with plastic wrap; let rest 5 minutes.



8. STRETCH

Using fingertips, press dough out toward edges of pan, taking care not to tear it. (If dough resists, let it relax 5 to 10 minutes and try again.)



9. POKE, SPRINKLE, REST

With dinner fork, poke dough surface 25 to 30 times. Sprinkle rosemary evenly over top. Let dough rest in pan until slightly bubbly, 5 to 10 minutes.



10. BAKE

Bake on preheated stones at 450 degrees until tops are golden brown, 25 to 28 minutes, switching position of pans halfway through baking.



TECHNIQUE

FOR BIG FLAVOR, A LONG REST IS BEST

Creating a small batch of starter dough (also known as a preferment, or a biga in Italian) boosts the flavor in our bread dramatically. A starter is made by combining small amounts of flour and water with a little yeast and allowing it to ferment overnight. With a lengthy rest, long carbohydrate chains that have little taste break down into a multitude of sugars and alcohol with lots of flavor.



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