

Focaccia di Recco

By Emiko

As legend has it, when the citizens of Recco where in hiding during the Crusades, they created this focaccia with what little they had (flour, water, olive oil, and some cheese). Today you can find this thin focaccia filled with melty cheese in every bakery, pizzeria, and restaurant in town. It can be round or rectangular, but the important thing is the dough must be as thin as possible. Using bread flour gives the dough great elasticity, which means it's easier to stretch the dough without breaking it. You can do it with all-purpose flour, but you may need to handle it more delicately. It's a pure joy to eat.

Makes 3-4 focacce

- 3/4 cups (200 milliliters) water
 - 1/2 cup (100 milliliters) olive oil, plus more for greasing and drizzling
 - 2 teaspoons (10 grams) salt, plus more for sprinkling
 - 3 cups (400 grams) bread flour
 - 1 pound (500 grams) stracchino or Crescenza cheese
1. Using a wooden spoon, mix the water, olive oil, salt, and 1 cup of flour in a medium bowl until smooth. Add the remaining 2 cups of flour little by little, mixing with the spoon until thoroughly combined. Knead by hand in the bowl for 5 minutes or until smooth and elastic (poke it; it should bounce back easily). Let rest, wrapped in plastic, in the fridge for 2 to 3 hours.
 2. Preheat the oven to 480° F (250° C), and grease a baking sheet or a round pizza tray with olive oil.
 3. Divide the dough into 4 even pieces and keep them under a tea towel or wrapped in plastic wrap when not in use. Roll out the dough ball initially with a rolling pin on a floured work surface, then begin stretching it carefully with your hands, using the weight of the dough to help stretch it. Get the dough as thin as you can, then transfer it to the prepared baking tray. Lay spoonfuls of the cheese over the dough. Take another piece of dough and roll and stretch again as before. Lay this layer over the cheese. With a knife, a rolling pin, or your hands, tap the edges of the dough together all along the border of the tray to trim the dough to exactly the size of the tray (see pictures for reference). Go over the edges of the focaccia again with your thumb, pressing down to seal the edges of the two layers of dough (again, see the pictures). Gather the excess dough, and roll into a ball to use for the next focaccia.
 4. Pinch the top of the dough in 5 or 6 places to create holes for steam to escape. Drizzle the top of the focaccia with a bit of oil and sprinkle with a pinch of salt. Bake for 7 minutes, until lightly golden brown and the cheese has melted.
 5. While the first focaccia is in the oven, prepare the second with the remaining dough (adding the scraps from the first to the balls of dough) and bake when the first is out of the oven; I'd recommend only baking one at a time as the distribution of heat will be compromised with more than one in the oven.
 6. The dough can also be frozen (wrap it tightly in two layers of plastic wrap and then freeze.) Before using the dough, defrost overnight in the fridge or for a few hours on the counter. The dough will keep in the freezer for up to 3 months.