

JULY

Summer Focaccia

For our July lesson in the Better Baking Academy with Bob's Red Mill, we bring you an instant Italian favorite: delightfully dimpled and pillowy soft Summer Focaccia. Whether sweet or savory, focaccia comes together with just a few simple pantry ingredients creating a lofty flatbread that can be customized with an array of toppings. Starting with a high hydration ratio, our savory dough forgoes traditional kneading, relying on the high protein content of Bob's Red Mill Artisan Bread Flour and a simple folding technique to build exquisite elasticity. We then bake this stunner on a baking sheet, and the generous addition of olive oil and relatively high baking temperature creates a crispy exterior with an airy and open interior. Our Summer Focaccia showcases bright and seasonal chopped produce, but this bread is also the perfect palette for fresh herbs or an array of cheeses and meats. Whether you are enjoying the bread fresh from the oven or using slices to create epic sandwiches, focaccia is a must for your baking repertoire. We'll take you through each step of the process, from building elasticity in the dough via folding to creating the characteristic olive oil-catching indentations.



INGREDIENT BREAKDOWN

Great recipes require great ingredients. Here's how each of our recipe's simple ingredients contributes to making focaccia you'll fawn over.

WATER: Moisture, in the form of warm water, is needed to activate the yeast and hydrate the dough so the gluten can develop. Because focaccia dough isn't kneaded with a traditional kneading process, this dough relies on a higher hydration level. This high hydration not only helps to build elasticity, but in the oven, the water is converted to steam, which helps leaven the dough and prevents the crust from forming too quickly and burning.

EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL: Extra-virgin olive oil plays multiple parts in our focaccia, enriching the dough with fat and adding a savory flavor. Extra-virgin olive oil is the finest-produced olive oil from the first press and contains only 1% acid. Smooth, with a fruity flavor, the color ranges from golden yellow to pale green. Olive oil also makes the dough more elastic, lubricating the dough so it is easier to stretch. Finally, drizzling the dough with olive oil before adding toppings helps create a barrier and keeps moisture from effecting the dough, making a crispier crust.

BOB'S RED MILL ARTISAN BREAD FLOUR: The process of folding the dough to develop the gluten network calls for a high-protein flour. Bob's Red Mill Artisan Bread Flour offers plenty of protein to create an elastic network of gluten without traditional kneading and, as a bonus, leads to the perfectly chewy texture of focaccia.

KOSHER SALT: As a general rule of thumb, the ratio of salt to flour in breads is 1.8% to 2% of flour weight. It's important to weigh your salt because different salt crystals measure differently. Dough without enough salt easily overferments. Salt also helps with crust color and enhances flavor.

INSTANT YEAST: In contrast to active dry yeast, instant yeast contains 25% more living yeast cells because it is processed more gently. A single-celled organism, yeast will grow and multiply when it receives the following: moisture, food (sugar and carbs), and warmth. It leavens the dough by converting carbohydrates into carbon dioxide gas and alcohol.

SUMMER PRODUCE: We chose an array of colorful sweet peppers for our Summer Focaccia, but feel free to add any seasonal produce of your choice. Tomatoes, corn, summer squash, and onions make great additions, as well as fresh herbs like chives, basil, thyme, and rosemary. You can also reach for olives, capers, cheeses, and cured meats to turn it up a notch.

FLAKED SEA SALT: Used as a finishing salt, this ultra-light and flaky sea salt adds a soft crunch and delicately salty flavor to baked goods.



SUMMER FOCACCIA



SUMMER FOCACCIA

Makes 1 (17¼x12¼-inch) loaf

In Italy, regional variations of focaccia range from sweet and enriched versions to salty and savory renditions, but one thing is for certain: this bread is beloved wherever it travels. We started our classic olive oil-based focaccia with high-protein Bob's Red Mill Artisan Bread Flour, developing its gluten structure through a simple folding process to build elasticity and create a light and airy crumb. After the second rise, we created the dimples characteristic of this Italian bread, which allows the olive oil to permeate into the dough, creating an unbeatable crisp crust and chewy crumb. A meal in itself or the perfect sandwich companion, this is your go-to bread for the summer.

- 2½ cups (560 grams) water, room temperature (70°F/21°C to 75°F/24°C)
 - 7 tablespoons (98 grams) extra-virgin olive oil, divided
 - 6 cups (762 grams) Bob's Red Mill Artisan Bread Flour
 - 5 teaspoons (15 grams) kosher salt
 - 2¼ teaspoons (7 grams) instant yeast
 - 1½ cups chopped fresh summer produce (see Note)
 - 2 teaspoons (4 grams) flaked sea salt
- Garnish: crushed red pepper, ground black pepper

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, place 2½ cups (560 grams) room temperature water and 3 tablespoons (42 grams) oil. Add flour, kosher salt, and yeast. Beat at low speed for 4 minutes. Scrape sides of bowl and paddle. Increase mixer speed to medium-low, and beat until dough pulls away from sides of bowl and forms a smooth ball on paddle, 2 to 3 minutes.

2. Oil a large bowl. Place dough in bowl. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) for 1½ hours, folding dough in bowl every 30 minutes. (To fold, use wet or oiled hands to reach under one side of dough; gently stretch up, and fold over center. Repeat 3 more times around bowl.)

3. Line bottom of a rimmed 17¼x12¼-inch baking sheet with parchment paper. Brush with 2 tablespoons (28 grams) oil.

4. Turn out dough onto prepared pan, and using just your fingertips, gently stretch dough to completely fill pan. (If dough is tight and will not stretch completely, let stand for 5 to 10 minutes and then try again.) Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) for 30 minutes.

5. Uncover dough, and dimple using your fingertips, touching pan through dough without tearing dough. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until dough is level with sides of pan, about 30 minutes.

6. Preheat oven to 450°F (230°C).

7. Drizzle dough with remaining 2 tablespoons (28 grams) oil. Top with produce, and sprinkle with flaked sea salt.

8. Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 425°F (220°C), and bake until deep golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted in center registers 205°F (96°C), about 10 minutes more. Let cool on pan for 10 minutes. Remove from pan. Serve warm, or let cool completely on a wire rack. Garnish with crushed red pepper and black pepper, if desired.

Note: *We love our kitchen scale, but we didn't offer grams for our fresh summer produce. Why? There are so many wonderful options to choose from, and the weight will inevitable vary. Instead, use volume rather than weight as your guide for the amount of toppings.*



DOUGH HYDRATION

By boosting the dough hydration level and using high-protein bread flour, we unleash the secret to focaccia's chewy yet tender crumb



1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, place $2\frac{2}{3}$ cups (560 grams) room temperature water and 3 tablespoons (42 grams) oil. Add flour, kosher salt, and yeast. Beat at low speed for 4 minutes. The liquid in this dough (water plus oil) accounts for more than 75% of the total ingredients, meaning the dough has a high hydration. The greater ratio of liquid allows the gluten network formation without traditional kneading. We can also bypass the yeast activation step by using instant yeast. Since you won't see the initial rise, make sure that your yeast is fresh or periodically perform a freshness test to avoid adding inactive yeast to your dough.

DOUGH HYDRATION



2. Scrape sides of bowl and paddle. Increase mixer speed to medium-low, and beat until dough pulls away from sides of bowl and forms a smooth ball on paddle, 2 to 3 minutes. Since this is a high-hydration dough, the paddle attachment helps blend the ingredients into a homogenous mass, so there is no need to switch to a dough hook like you would with stiffer doughs. Just remember, the dough will be stickier and more fluid than doughs with a lower hydration level.

NO NEED TO KNEAD

The traditional practice of kneading is replaced with a simple folding technique in focaccia dough



1. Oil a large bowl. Place dough in bowl. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) for 1½ hours, folding dough in bowl every 30 minutes. As the name implies, a high-hydration dough is relatively wet, so before folding, wet or oil your hands to prevent sticking. Reach under one side of dough, and gently stretch the edge of the dough as high as you can without tearing. Once you reach the top, fold the dough over the center. This motion strengthens the gluten network and is the preferred method to build elasticity for doughs that have high hydration levels. Repeat three more times around bowl to complete one round of folding. Fold the dough in the bowl every 30 minutes for a total of 1½ hours. By the last fold, you should notice the dough has become smooth and elastic.

PASSING THE TEST

After the folding period, the dough should pass the windowpane test. Using well-floured hands, pinch—but don't tear, because this damages the gluten strands—a small, golf ball-size piece of dough. Then gently and slowly pull and rotate the dough out from the center. If the dough is ready, you will be able to stretch it until it's thin and translucent. If it fails to hold during the stretch or is too sticky, give your dough one more round of folding and try again after it has rested for 30 minutes.



A CLOSER LOOK

BAKING SHEET PERFECTION

This gorgeous flatbread bakes in a half sheet pan, meaning it is the perfect bread to bring to parties or cut into slices for sandwiches



BAKING SHEET PERFECTION



1. Line bottom of a rimmed 17¼x12¼-inch baking sheet with parchment paper. Brush with 2 tablespoons (28 grams) oil. Turn out dough onto prepared pan, and using just your fingertips, gently stretch dough to completely fill pan. If the dough is pulling back and resists stretching completely to the sides, the gluten network may need a brief rest. Let the dough stand for 5 to 10 minutes and then try again.



2. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) for 30 minutes. During this step, the yeast is releasing carbon dioxide, allowing the dough to rise while building flavor. This dough will be baked in a very hot oven in order to get the proper oven-spring and the characteristic golden-brown and crispy exterior.

BAKING SHEET PERFECTION



3. Uncover dough, and dimple using your fingertips, touching pan through dough without tearing dough. Indenting the dough creates more surface area, ensuring an even bake and allowing the delicious olive oil to permeate the crust. With your fingers spaced well apart, press into the dough to create a craggy, dimpled appearance. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until dough is level with sides of pan, about 30 minutes. During this rise, preheat your oven to 450°F (230°C) to ensure that the oven is the perfect temperature when your dough is ready.



4. Drizzle dough with remaining 2 tablespoons (28 grams) oil. Top with produce, and sprinkle with flaked sea salt. The olive oil not only adds flavor and crunch to the crust, but it also waterproofs the dough before the toppings are added. For seasonal produce, we chose to top our focaccia with a colorful array of sweet peppers, but feel free to add chives, corn, green onions, squash, zucchini and more! From cheeses and cured meats to fragrant fresh herbs like rosemary, chives, and basil, this bread is your blank canvas. Just make sure to limit the amount of excess moisture for best results (i.e., drain wet toppings like olives and artichoke hearts before using). We also garnished our bread with flaked sea salt, crushed red pepper, and black pepper for an extra pop of flavor.

BAKING SHEET PERFECTION



5. Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 425°F (220°C), and bake until deep golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted in center registers 205°F (96°C), about 10 minutes more. Let cool on pan for 10 minutes. Remove from pan. Serve warm, or let cool completely on a wire rack. Unlike other breads that require you to wait until completely cooled before cutting, focaccia can be enjoyed warm. The generous amount of olive oil in the dough helps resist starch retrogradation, and the thin shape allows for moisture to regulate evenly. This bread is also a great candidate for freezing. Cut into pieces, and freeze in an airtight container. Reheat in the oven until just warm for best results.

TIP-TOP TOPPINGS

The best part about this focaccia? The endless combination of summery toppings it can have. Feel free to use any combination of the following ingredients to make your own perfect focaccia.

TOPPING	PREP	SUGGESTIONS	PRO TIPS
CHEESE	Shred block or wedge cheese, regularly or finely. Crumble soft cheeses like goat cheese and feta.	Parmesan, Asiago, fontina, mozzarella, feta, goat cheese	We recommend buying blocks or wedges of cheese rather than preshredded cheese, as preshredded cheese is often coated in potato starch and natamycin (an anti-mold agent). These components can affect the way the cheese melts onto your bread, so when shopping, reach for the block or wedge rather than the bag.
FRESH HERBS	Chop fresh herbs finely or remove small leaves from stems and use leaves whole.	Rosemary, chives, basil, parsley, thyme, parsley	Remember to properly wash and pat dry your fresh herbs before chopping.
DRIED HERBS	Use dried leaves, not ground herbs.	Oregano, basil, thyme, herbs de Provence	Dried herbs, like spices, will lose their pungency over time, so check to make sure you're using herbs that haven't exceeded their expiration date.
VEGETABLES	Cut vegetables into rounds or dice into cubes. Remove fresh corn kernels from corn cobs. Cut grape tomatoes in half.	Summer squash, zucchini, green onions, fresh corn, onion (red, sweet, or yellow), eggplant, grape tomatoes, garlic, roasted garlic, caramelized onions	To reduce bitterness and liquid content of fresh eggplant, in a medium bowl, toss sliced or diced eggplant generously with salt and let sit for 10 minutes. Rinse the eggplant completely and pat dry before using.
MEATS	Slice meats like pepperoni and sopresatta into rounds or cut into cubes. Tear prosciutto or add cubed prosciutto. Shred cooked meats like chicken and pork.	Pepperoni, prosciutto, sopresatta, grilled chicken, roasted pork	Cured meats add flavor and caramelize in the oven. If using non-cured meats like shredded chicken or pork, make sure the meat is cooked through before adding.



TIP-TOP TOPPINGS (CONTINUED)

The best part about this focaccia? The endless combination of summery toppings it can have. Feel free to use any combination of the following ingredients to make your own perfect focaccia.

TOPPING	PREP	SUGGESTIONS	PRO TIPS
JARRED CONDIMENTS	Drain if packed in oily brine or water. Roughly chop if large.	Olives, artichoke hearts, capers, roasted red peppers, sun-dried tomatoes	There is no need to rinse oil from oil-packed condiments, but be sure to drain water-based condiments completely before using.
FRESH FRUIT	Cut peaches into wedges or chop into cubes. Cut grapes in half, and strawberries in half or quarters.	Peaches, grapes, strawberries	Some popular combinations are peach and thyme, rosemary and concord grape, and strawberry, basil and goat cheese focaccia.
GARNISH	Lightly sprinkle on seasoning.	Everything bagel seasoning, flaked sea salt, red pepper flakes, black pepper, balsamic reduction, flavored olive oil	Be mindful of adding too much salt to your bread by way of salty toppings and garnish.

