

James Hillery's focaccia recipe and top tips

Focaccia

Ingredients

500g strong bread flour, plus extra for dusting
7g dried fast action yeast
2 tsp fine sea salt
5 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for the tin and to serve
1 tsp flaky sea salt
¼ small bunch of rosemary, sprigs picked

Oven 220C/200C fan/gas 7.

Makes 1 large focaccia

Method

Tip the flour into a large bowl. Add the yeast into one side of the flour, and the salt into the other side.

Make a well in the middle of the flour and add 2 tbsp oil and 350ml room temp water.

Tip the dough onto the worksurface

Knead for 5-10 mins until your dough is soft and barely sticky.

Put the dough into a clean bowl, cover with a tea towel and leave to prove for 1 hr until doubled in size.

Oil a shallow tin (25 x 35cm). Tip the dough into the tin and stretch it to fill the tin.

Cover with a tea towel and leave to prove for another 35-45 mins.

Heat the oven to 220C/200C fan/gas 7.

Press your fingers into the dough to make dimples. Mix 1½ tbsp olive oil, 1 tbsp water and the flaky salt and drizzle over the bread. Push sprigs of rosemary into the dimples in the dough.

Bake for 20-25 mins until golden.

Whilst the bread is still hot, drizzle over 1-2 tbsp olive oil.

Top High Hydration Dough Tips

- Know the hydration of your dough, the higher the hydration, the stickier and wetter the dough will be to start.
 - The calculation is easy:
 - The weight of the water (1ml=1g), divided by the weight of the flour in the recipe.
 - For our focaccia recipe: 350g water / 500g flour = 70% hydration.
 - A focaccia could be up to 80% hydration, but to start with 70% is plenty wet enough to get the technique perfected (a standard white loaf is around 60% hydration).
- Don't fear the stickiness and be tempted to add more flour. The process of kneading will build strength and it will become a nice soft dough.
 - Add a little oil or water onto to the worksurface, not flour. This helps with the kneading process without lowering the dough hydration.

- Knead in the bowl to start. I find building some strength in the bowl helps before you move the dough to the worksurface. There are two main techniques I use, which are also broadly used in sourdough - a stretch and fold and a coil fold.
- A bench scraper is your friend. A plastic or metal bench scraper is a great tool to mix in the ingredients in the bowl, scrape dough off your hands and move the dough around on your work surface.
- When working the dough, speed and a light touch is key. You want to move the dough quickly and confidently. The less time holding the dough, the less time it has to stick to you.
- Your hand will get sticky, wash off the dough with cold water. Hot or warm water just makes it stickier and trickier to remove.
- Finally, prove using your eyes not the clock. Prove at room temperature, you do not need a warm airing cupboard and let it rise to double in size for both proofs.