

# How to Make the Perfect Pizza Dough

Use these tips and recipe from Yvonne Maffei to make your own pizza from scratch.

I grew up with a Sicilian grandmother who made dozens of jars of fresh tomato sauce every summer. It was also around the same time that she made fresh bread, pizza and zeppole (fried dough). It was actually the perfect excuse to have the family gather around the table to enjoy that special moment when the dough was freshly baked into bread, just for us.

Days earlier, Nonna would have been seen mixing flour, yeast, salt and olive oil to make the dough. The kitchen tables (yes, there was more than one) were filled with large clumps of cloth-covered dough, waiting for them to each inflate to a large mass that she would then divide into pizza bases. By the time the pizza came out of the oven, it was the most sought-after item on the table and nothing at any supermarket or store could replace it.

So what was Nonna's secret to all that bread-making without a written recipe and with a consistent flavour and texture every single time? Over the years I can only take away what I observed, for there still isn't a written recipe in my possession, but I've watched carefully, asked many questions and practised it a lot at home.

There are a few simple steps to help you bake the perfect pizza dough every time, insha Allah.

Use the best ingredients you can find. Flour is important and it should not be bleached or processed. Olive oil should be pure and not a blend of olive with pomace or vegetable oil. Don't use hydrogenated oils either.

Always use fresh yeast, as this addition is what makes the dough rise. If it's not fresh it will not rise properly.

Most pizza dough recipes, once combined and shaped into a ball, need to rise for about 1-1.5 hours or just enough time for them to double in size. The important part isn't so much the time spent rising as the volume of the dough.

Once dough rises, it can be refrigerated or frozen. In both cases, it should be tightly sealed and used within 2-3 days (fresh) or 2-3 weeks (frozen).

Calibrate your oven at home to make sure it's working properly, as bread and pizza dough making are very dependent upon hot ovens to cook evenly and properly. If you aren't sure whether or not your oven is working as it should, you can get an inexpensive oven thermometer at most cookware shops which will tell you whether or not the temperature reaches the degrees at which you set it.

If using a stand mixer to knead the dough (as opposed to your hands), be sure to use the dough hook that comes with it and not any of the other attachments. Also, don't over-knead or you will create a glue-like texture in the dough due to over-developing the gluten in it.

Want to try it yourself now? Here's my go-to recipe for Basic Pizza Dough.

Yields dough for one large pizza on a standard baking sheet.

## Ingredients

- 2 tsp active dry yeast
- ½ tsp sugar
- 1 cup warm water
- 2 ½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- ¼ tsp salt
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

## Method

*Note: If you're using a stand mixer, place the yeast and sugar into the same bowl you'll use to mix your dough.*

1. Add the warm water, sugar and yeast to the mixing bowl and use a spoon or fork to dissolve. Cover and let it set for 10 minutes in a warm place.
2. Remove the cover from the yeast mixture. Add ½ cup of the flour, the salt and the oil to the yeast mixture. Use the dough hook to knead the flour into the mixture.
3. Continue to add flour to the mixture, ½ cup at a time, mixing after every addition. Knead until all flour has been completely blended. The dough may not form into a perfect ball just by using the dough hook, so remove from the stand mixer. Add a little oil to your hands and work with the dough inside of the bowl, scraping up any flour on the sides and bottom of the bowl and begin to form a ball using your hands. Add more oil to your hands, if necessary, but only a little bit at a time.
4. Keep mixing and kneading with your hands until you have a ball of dough. Keep the dough in the bowl. Cover and let rise for one hour.
5. Preheat the oven to 232°C/450°F just before preparing to roll out the dough. Lightly oil a sheet pan and sprinkle a little cornmeal on top to help give the crust bottom a bit of texture and to prevent it from sticking to the pan.
6. On a floured surface roll out the dough and knead to fit the sheet pan. Crimp the edges of the pizza all the way around. Add 1⅓ cup of prepared tomato sauce, then add any cheese and toppings. Bake for 15 minutes or until cheese has turned slightly brown around the edges and the crust has browned. Let cool slightly before serving, if everyone can wait that long!