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Food & Home

1 Neapolitan-Style Pizza Dough, 3 Flavor Combos

Written by: [Margaret Willes](#) | Published on: April 18, 2024

EXCLUSIVE

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Crowned by a rim of pillow-y-soft, leopard-spotted crust and topped with tomato sauce, mozzarella, and basil, a classic Neapolitan is a master class in simplicity. While some cooks might leave the pizza making to the pros, food writer [Alexandra Stafford](#) proves with her latest cookbook, *Pizza Night*, that slinging your own pies at home can be not only tasty but also entirely achievable. With 4 doughs, 52 pizzas, and 52 complementary salads, it's packed with enough home-cook-friendly recipes for an entire year. Here, Stafford shares three pizza recipes from her new release, all featuring her Neapolitan-style dough, plus some of her best pizza-making tips.



ALEXANDRA STAFFORD

Pizza Night

Bookshop, \$27.90

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THE DOUGH



Neapolitanish Pizza Dough

A true Neapolitan is traditionally baked in a wood-burning oven for no more than 90 seconds at around 900 degrees Fahrenheit. Since consumer-grade ovens generally top out at 500 or 550 degrees, it can be tough to do it full justice in a home kitchen—but Stafford's recipe is close to perfection. It calls for a bit more water than you'd usually find in a Neapolitan dough, which helps accommodate the longer bake time while still ensuring a cloudlike texture.

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THE PIZZAS



Peach Pizza with Jalapeño, Prosciutto, and Crème Fraîche

Balancing sweet, salty, and spicy in every bite, Stafford's creation employs her number one favorite pizza topping: crème fraîche. "I love a white pizza, and I feel like it adds a nice richness, but with that tang," she says. To round it all out, serve the pizza with a bed of bitter greens—arugula, radicchio, endive—lightly dressed with equal parts olive oil and aged balsamic, shaved Parmesan, and salt. (This would make a great side for any pizza.)

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Roasted Broccoli Pizza with Tomato Butter and Olives

Deemed by Stafford to be "a revelation," the tomato butter requires minimal but high-quality ingredients. "You roast the tomatoes with the onions, purée it with a little bit of water, and then add butter after—and it's the most flavorful sauce," she says. Given the availability of good cherry tomatoes year-round, it's a solid choice for a pizza sauce no matter the season.

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Roasted Hatch Chile Pizza with Corn and Oaxaca Cheese

Stafford created this unexpected flavor combo by looking to esquites, a popular Mexican street corn salad made with mayonnaise, lime juice, and chile powder. To anyone unconvinced that mayo belongs on a pizza: "So many of my recipe testers loved this one so much, and they were so surprised that mayonnaise on pizza would actually be delicious," she says.

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THE TIPS AND TOOLS

In the world of pizza making, Stafford says a successful outcome is determined by a series of small but important details. "The more you make it, the more you understand what the dough looks like, how it handles, what flours you have, how your oven behaves," she says. "It's almost like a language." Here, she imparts some pizza-making wisdom.

- **For optimal results, use a scale.** You've probably [heard it before](#), but Stafford says this is by far the most crucial piece of advice she can give. "Getting [your dough] to work could be a matter of 25 grams of water, and if you're not measuring precisely, then you can't troubleshoot in a meaningful way." A [simple no-frills digital scale](#) will do the job nicely.
- **Improve your crust with a baking steel.** Similar to a baking stone but better at retaining heat, a baking steel is a worthy (and game-changing) investment for cooks who want to elevate their crust without buying an outdoor oven. "It transfers the heat from the surface to the dough faster, and that's what creates those nice air pockets in the dough," she says. If you aren't yet ready to invest in a steel, bake your pizza on the reverse of an old sheet pan.
- **Make sure the dough is adequately salted.** "People are afraid of salt, but you should really use between 2 to 3 percent [of] the weight of the flour," Stafford says. (In the dough recipe above, that equates to about 15 grams for 550 grams of flour.) "It does not taste too salty, and it ensures that your dough is seasoned. It slows fermentation. It strengthens the gluten."
- **Don't rush it.** While it's possible to make good pizza in a few hours, *great* pizza needs a longer fermentation, which ensures a more complex flavor and airy texture (the dough will also be easier to handle). "Make your dough a couple nights before your pizza night. It's not a lot of hands-on time—it's just planning ahead," she says. "Make your dough, let it rise overnight, ball it up the next day, put it in the fridge for a couple days, for as long as a week." In particular, resist the temptation to rush the final proof, in which you bring the dough back to room temperature a few hours before baking.
- **If using store-bought dough, let it rest.** Stafford gets it: Even the simplest dough recipes might be more than some cooks are up for. While premade doughs can be finicky—they'll sometimes contract once you've stretched them—you can remedy the issue by letting them sit at room temperature for two to three hours (or even longer) before working with them. (While most grocery stores carry both fresh and frozen options, check at your local bakery or pizzeria as well; many will sell their own dough.)

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