

Cheesy Pepperoni Bread

This is the snack of a lifetime, all the savory cravings the human spirit desires spiraled into a crispy, cheesy, doughy, meaty package. It's filled with the flavors we've come to adore: fontina cheese, pepperoni, chile flakes, garlic and oregano. With cold beer, this will be your new favorite when watching the game. With a glass of wine, it could be a seductive late-night snack.

See Cook's Note on making a flavorful bread dough.

Ingredients

dough (or 1-pound store-bought pizza dough)

3/4 cup (6 ounces) warm water, or more as needed
1/2 teaspoon dry active yeast
2 cups (10 ounces) bread flour, or more as needed
1½ teaspoons sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon olive oil, plus more for storing

filling

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 large clove garlic, grated or minced
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
1/4 teaspoon chile flakes
30 slices pepperoni (about 5 ounces)
1 cup grated fontina cheese
1 large egg beaten with a splash of water
1/2 teaspoon fennel seeds

special equipment

stand mixer with dough hook attachment

Directions

for the dough

Put 1 tablespoon of the warm water in a small bowl and sprinkle the yeast over it, stirring to dissolve. Whisk the flour, sugar and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook. Pour in the dissolved yeast, then use the rest of the warm water to rinse the yeast out of the small bowl and into the dough. Add the oil. Mix on low speed until a ball forms and all the stray bits incorporate, about 2 minutes. Turn off the mixer and let the dough rest for 5 minutes. Mix on medium-low speed until the dough is smooth and elastic and passes the windowpane test, 5 to 7 minutes.

What's the windowpane test? It's a way to tell if the ingredients have evenly distributed and the gluten has developed properly which makes for a better dough. Tear a small piece of dough and pull and stretch, rotating it, to see if you can make a super thin, transparent "window" without it tearing. If it does tear, just mix for another minute or two until you get that window. If the dough seems to sticky, sprinkle in a little flour and mix for a few more minutes. If it seems too dry, add a little water and mix.

Pour a little oil in a gallon zip-top bag, shape the dough into a ball and toss in the bag, turning to coat with the oil. Seal and refrigerate at least 6 to 8 hours, or overnight if possible.

Remove the dough from the fridge at least 2 hours before you want to bake so it has time to warm up.

for assembling

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment or a silicone mat.

Lightly flour the counter and gently knead the dough into a ball. Roll the dough about 1/8-inch thick, shaping it into a long, thin rectangle.

Mix the oil and garlic in a small bowl and brush over the surface. Sprinkle the oregano and crushed red pepper on top. Lay the pepperoni slices over the surface, overlapping so they fit, and leaving a small margin on all edges. Sprinkle the cheese on top of the pepperoni. Tightly roll up the dough into a log, enclosing the filling.

Carefully transfer the log to the prepared baking sheet, placing it seam-side down and curving into a slight spiral shape. Leave enough room in the spiral for the bread to puff up. Pinch and tuck the ends under to close securely. Brush the roll with egg wash. Sprinkle the fennel seeds on top. Bake until the crust is golden brown, about 25 minutes. Let rest about 10 minutes before you cut into it, though the temptation to break into it immediately will be understandably strong.

Cook's Note

The longer the dough rests in the refrigerator, or retards, the more flavor it will have. If you want to make the dough the same day, try to allow 6 or 8 hours in the fridge so the flavors can develop. And be sure to allow the dough to ferment, or sit at room temperature, for 2 hours before baking to ensure a good rise.

total time: 9 hours

active prep: 25 minutes

serves: 4 to 6

difficulty: *medium*