

# FOCACCIA IS THE NEW SOURDOUGH

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

When the world started hunkering down last year, there was a resurgence of home baking because there was nowhere else to go but home. The pandemic has been hard and I am still troubled at all we've lost. To sustain my mental health, I try to be thankful for three things every day.

I'm thankful people are cooking at home, rediscovering gardening, channeling Chip and Joanna Gaines, and put-

ting together puzzles. One thing I am not thankful for ... the sourdough bread craze.

It sounds ludicrous that carbohydrate's biggest fan (me) would begrudge a burgeoning interest in home baking. But sourdough is too much pressure. Being fastened to developing a starter, feedings, watching for bubbles, managing temperatures and smelling for pungent flavors is too much. What was I doing instead? Probably watching "Tiger King" and that was enough drama in my life.

While the fear of sourdough commitment may say more about me than I'd like to publicly admit, I usually embrace high maintenance baked goods. I once brought a croissant dough with me to a dinner party to complete the three required turns. I excused myself from the table and disappeared to the kitchen, to reappear with a

**I PREFER NON-COMMITTAL BREAD. MY FAVORITE HOME BREAD PROJECT IS FOCACCIA. IT TAKES JUST A FEW HANDS-ON STEPS, PROOFS IN THE FRIDGE OVERNIGHT AND BAKES THE NEXT DAY.**

light dusting of flour on my clothes.

I prefer non-committal bread. My favorite home bread project is focaccia. It takes just a few hands-on steps, proofs in the fridge overnight and bakes the next day.

Sourdough makers, I love you. But at my house, be prepared for focaccia and an ever-growing layer of flour on me as I mysteriously vanish into the kitchen at a regular cadence.



Brian Medford

**Author Brian Medford isn't a fan of the 'sourdough craze' and instead prefers focaccia bread.**

### Focaccia bread (adapted from Bon Appétit)

#### Ingredients

- 3 cups bread flour
- 1 ½ teaspoons active dry yeast
- A pinch of sugar
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt (I like Diamond Crystal)
- 4 to 6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 tablespoon flaky salt

#### Preparation

Combine the flour and 1 ¼ cups room-temperature water in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook. Mix on low speed, scraping down the sides to incorporate any dry flour, until a shaggy dough forms. Let rest.

Stir yeast, sugar, and ¼ cup of barely-warm water with a fork in a small bowl to dissolve. Let sit until the yeast is foamy.

Pour the yeast mixture into the stand mixer bowl and mix on the lowest speed until the dough absorbs the water. Add kosher salt. Continue to mix, increasing the speed to medium, until the dough is extremely elastic and sticky, about five minutes.

Pour 2 tablespoons oil into a medium bowl and coat the sides. Scrape the dough into the bowl. Cover and place in a warm spot until the dough doubles in size, about two hours.

Rub 2 tablespoons oil on the bottom and sides of a 9 by 13 inch sheet

pan. Using a spatula, fold dough inside the bowl to deflate, then scrape onto the sheet pan. Lift up the dough and fold over onto itself in half, then rotate the sheet pan 90 degrees and fold in half again. Cover the dough with a piece of oiled plastic wrap and rest 15 minutes.

Uncover the dough and gently stretch the dough across length and width of the sheet pan, working all the way to edges and into corners. If the dough springs back, let it rest for 5 to 10 minutes and try again. Cover with oiled plastic wrap and place in the fridge for eight hours, up to 24 hours.

Remove the sheet pan from the fridge and let sit in a warm spot until the dough is puffed and bubbly and nearly doubled in height, about an hour.

Preheat oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit.

Remove the plastic and drizzle the dough generously with more oil. Press fingertips firmly into the dough to dimple all over. Sprinkle with flaky salt.

Bake on the middle rack until surface is deep golden brown, 24 to 30 minutes. Let cool in the pan for 10 minutes. Slide a metal spatula underneath the focaccia. Transfer to a wire rack and cool.

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