

Pizza Proud

Sampling regional styles for this favorite food

By DANIEL NEMAN
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

New York pizza isn't Chicago pizza, which isn't California pizza, which isn't Detroit pizza.

Each region has its own signature style, its own unique way of making pizza. It can be hard to believe they're all variations on the same theme.

And none of the styles is precisely what you'd get in Italy, the ancestral home of pizza and a land full of its own proud regional styles. Yet the residents of New York and Chicago and California and Detroit all swear that their method is the only true way to make real pizza.

Pizza is crust, sauce and cheese, and in each style these essential elements are as different as New York is from California, as Chicago is from Detroit — and all of them from St. Louis.

As with most ethnic foods, pizza first made its way to this country through New York, so it is there that I decided to begin a recent culinary journey across the United States.

New York pizza is simple and unfussy; it is meant to be eaten on the go. It's often sold by the slice at take-out joints that sometimes don't even have chairs; you eat it while standing at a counter after you've just stopped in for a quick bite of something, oh, totally delicious.

The crust of a New York pizza is thin and pliable. It is meant to be folded in half lengthwise before it is eaten, doubling your pizza pleasure with every bite. But even though it is defiantly plain, the crust dough does benefit by rising at least one day in the refrigerator to allow its familiar flavor to fully develop.

The sauce, too, is simple and straightforward; it is merely crushed or pureed tomatoes mixed with just a few other herbs (oregano) and spices (garlic) for a little extra flavor. The sauce is so easy to make that it doesn't even have to be cooked before it is used. The ingredients that require heat to release their flavor (oregano, garlic) get enough from the brief cooking time in a very hot oven.

Chicago pizza is probably this country's next most famous variety, but only because it is so amazingly, spectacularly good.

There are actually two styles native to the Windy City, and the lesser known one is by far my favorite.

Stuffed pizza begins with a buttery, thin, light crust on the bottom topped with gobs and gobs of melted cheese and your favorite topping (spinach is amazing), topped by another thin crust — so it's like a pie — and then the whole thing is spread with a thin layer of oregano-heavy tomato sauce.

It is divine, and when I lived in Chicago, I ate it all the time. But I was young then, and these days I don't need all those calories. No one needs all those calories.

So I made the more popular version of a Chicago pizza, deep dish pizza — which isn't on anybody's diet plan, either.

The most significant part of a deep dish pizza is the crust, which bakes up thick and full of air bubbles, but has more bite and is chewier than the others. A layer of sliced mozzarella cheese goes on top of it to act as a buffer that keeps the sauce from infiltrating that perfect crust.

Your choice of toppings goes next, and I tend to use a light hand with these. One popular Chicago pizzeria supposedly uses two pounds of sausage on their deep-dish pizzas, which to my way of thinking turns the dish into a sausage sandwich. I prefer the path of moderation, which allows the sauce, cheese and crust to blend with the toppings in harmony.

Like the New York pizza, the sauce on a deep dish is simple and deliciously understated. You simply take a can of top-quality tomatoes and crush them with your hands. Drain them through a strainer so they lose their excess moisture (this step is crucial) and then mix in the familiar garlic and oregano, along with salt and pepper.

California pizza is harder to define. Invented or at least popularized by Wolfgang Puck and, yes, California Pizza Kitchen, it is characterized by a host of unusual toppings on a light and airy crust, often without a sauce.

The most famous versions of California pizza are Puck's iconic pizza with crème fraiche, smoked salmon and caviar, and the one that put California Pizza Kitchen on the map, barbecue chicken pizza.

I didn't want to make those. I wanted to make my own, which at least highlights the flexibility of the California pizza style.

I kind of accidentally chose to go vegan, by caramelizing onions with fennel and a hint of garlic and thyme. I roasted a red pepper and added strips of it, adding lovely pops of flavor to the subtlety and the sweetness of the onions and fennel.

It was a delight: unexpected, healthful and very Californian.

Meanwhile, Detroit pizza is enjoying a current moment in the pizza pantheon. The Motor City marvel is instantly recognizable by its rectangular shape, its crust that resembles a thick slice of artisanal bread, its liberal use of cheese and its sweet sauce.

The pizza's distinctive shape is directly related to its city of origin: the rectangular baking pans were originally created to serve as automotive drip pans or as trays to hold tools and parts.

Detroit pizza is also notable for its cheese; it doesn't just use mozzarella, it uses a mix of mozzarella and brick cheese. Brick cheese is a mild cheese, but not as mild as mozzarella, that comes from Wisconsin. I happily stumbled upon it at an Italian grocery, but it can be hard to find; if you can't locate it, muenster or Monterey Jack will do.

Detroit pizza is so sin-



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Homemade pizza, New York style.



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Homemade pizza, California style.

gular that it is the source of one of those raging, ongoing debates that can split a city in two: Who has the best Detroit pizza, Buddy's or Shield's?

I can categorically state that the answer is Shield's, based on precise scientific reasoning: It is the only one I have been to.

NEW YORK PIZZA

Yield: 8 servings (4 small pizzas)

For the crust

- 2 1/4 cups water, room temperature
- 6 cups (796 grams) all-purpose or bread flour
- 1 teaspoon instant dry yeast
- 2 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- For the sauce**
- 1 (28-ounce) can tomato puree or tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Handful of fresh basil, if available
- 1 to 2 teaspoons granulated sugar, optional
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 1/2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- Pinch of red pepper flakes, optional
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper, optional
- 8 ounces shredded or sliced mozzarella cheese
- Note: For best results, make the dough 1 to 3 days before baking the pizza.**

1. For the dough: Place water in mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, mix flour, yeast, salt and sugar. Add flour mixture to water and stir until all the flour has been incorporated. Add oil and knead until smooth, 4 to 5 minutes.
 2. Divide dough into 4 equal pieces, shape each into a ball, and place into 4 greased bowls or freezer bags. Seal or tightly cover and refrigerate overnight or up to 72 hours.
 3. When ready to use, remove dough from refrigerator and bring to room temperature, 1 hour or less. Meanwhile, place a pizza stone or upside-down baking sheet on the middle rack of your oven and preheat to 550 degrees, if possible, at least 1 hour.
 4. For the sauce: While the dough warms and the oven heats, combine tomato puree or sauce, olive oil, basil, sugar if using, salt, oregano, garlic powder, onion powder, and red pepper flakes and black pepper if using. If sauce is too thick, add water, a little at a time.
 5. Line a pizza peel or the back of a baking sheet with parchment paper or dust with flour. When

dough has warmed for 1 hour, place 1 ball (or 2, if they'll fit) onto the prepared pizza peel and gently stretch each one into as large a circle as you can make it without tearing. If dough tears, simply pinch it closed. Top with sauce, cheese and your favorite toppings, if using.

6. Transfer pizza from peel to oven or slide parchment paper onto preheated pizza pan or baking sheet and cook for 4 to 6 minutes until browned on top and cheese has melted but not burned.

Per serving: 570 calories; 17 g fat; 5 g saturated fat; no cholesterol; 20 g protein; 85 g carbohydrate; 7 g sugar; 5 g fiber; 1,373 mg sodium; 182 mg calcium. — Recipe by feedingfoodish.com

CHICAGO DEEP-DISH PIZZA

Yield: 4 (two-slice) servings

- 1 (28-ounce) can top-quality whole tomatoes, such as from San Marzano, Italy
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- 1 packet (2 1/4 teaspoons) active dry yeast
- 18 ounces all-purpose flour (about 3 1/2 cups)
- 2 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided
- 1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon corn oil, plus additional for oiling the bowl
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 12 ounces deli-sliced part-skim mozzarella
- Your choice of toppings**
- 3/4 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- Grated Parmesan cheese, for topping and garnish**
- 1. Set a strainer above a bowl. Crush the tomatoes by hand and add to the strainer; do not add the juice in the can. Allow to drain at least 45 minutes. Position an oven rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 450 degrees. Meanwhile, make the dough for the crust.
 2. Mix sugar, yeast and 11 ounces room temperature water (about 80 degrees) in a bowl and let bloom for 15 minutes. Combine flour, 2 teaspoons of the salt and cream of tartar in the bowl of a stand mixer. Once yeast has bloomed, add to dry ingredients along with corn oil. Gently combine with a rubber spatula until a rough ball is formed.
 3. Knead on high speed with the dough hook for 90 seconds. Transfer to a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap and let rise about 6 hours. Punch down and let dough settle for 15 more minutes.
 4. Coat bottom and sides of a

12-inch cake pan, Chicago-style pizza pan or cast-iron skillet with melted butter. Using your hands, spread out about three-quarters of the dough across the bottom and up the sides of the pan (save the remainder for another use). The dough will probably slide down the sides, but keep trying.

5. Cover entire bottom in mozzarella, all the way up to the edge. Add whatever toppings you choose.

6. In a bowl, combine drained, crushed tomatoes with oregano, garlic powder, the remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt and pepper. Spread tomatoes across top of pizza to the edge. Sprinkle evenly with grated Parmesan.

7. Bake, rotating halfway through, until golden around the edge, about 25 minutes. Let rest for about 5 minutes, then either gently lift pizza out of pan or just cut your slice out of the pan like a pie.

Per serving: 1,021 calories; 50 g fat; 16 g saturated fat; 64 mg cholesterol; 35 g protein; 108 g carbohydrate; 5 g sugar; 5 g fiber; 1,813 mg sodium; 670 mg calcium — Adapted from a recipe by Jeff Mauro, via the Food Network

CALIFORNIA PIZZA

Yield: 6 servings (2 pizzas)

- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon (150 grams) 00 flour or all-purpose flour, see note
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon and 2 teaspoons (150 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1 1/4 teaspoons fine salt, divided
- 3/4 teaspoon active dry yeast
- 1 teaspoon plus 1 tablespoon olive oil, divided
- 1 large red pepper, or roasted red pepper from a jar
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 large onion, sliced thin
- 1 large fennel bulb, sliced thin
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme or pinch dried
- 1/2 cup pesto
- Note: Italian 00 flour is ground finer than all-purpose flour, and it makes a pizza crust that is both crisp and chewy. It is available at Italian grocery stores and some specialty stores. If you can't find it, use all all-purpose flour.**
- 1. In a large mixing bowl, combine flours and 1 teaspoon of the salt.
- 2. In a small mixing bowl, stir together 7 ounces (7/8 cup) lukewarm tap water, yeast and 1 teaspoon of the olive oil. Stir with your hand just until it all comes together in a ball. Let the mixture rest 15 minutes.
- 3. Flour your hands and a work surface, and gently but firmly knead rested dough until it becomes a smooth mass, about 3 minutes, putting more flour on your hands if the dough starts to stick to them. Cut dough into 2 equal pieces and shape each into a ball. Place on a heavily floured surface, cover with a dampened cloth and let rest and rise for 3 to 4 hours at room temperature or, preferably, 24 hours in the refrigerator. (If you refrigerate the dough, remove it 30 to 45 minutes before you begin to shape it for pizza.)
- 4. Meanwhile, arrange a rack in the center of the oven and place a pizza stone or upside-down baking sheet on it. Preheat oven to 500 degrees.
- 5. If using a fresh red pepper, roast it by placing it directly on the

grate over an open gas flame, occasionally turning with tongs until charred all over. If you do not have a gas stove, place on a foil-lined baking sheet in a 450 degree oven until skin is dark and pepper has collapsed, about 15 to 20 minutes. In either case, place pepper in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let sit 20 minutes, then remove charred skin with fingers.

6. Cut roasted or jarred red pepper into strips, discarding seeds and stem, and set aside.

7. Heat butter and remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large skillet over medium-low heat until butter melts. Add onion, fennel, garlic and remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt. Cook slowly, stirring occasionally, until onion is golden brown and vegetables are soft and tender, about 30 to 45 minutes. Five minutes before it is done, add thyme. Taste and add more salt if necessary.

8. On a floured surface, gently push and stretch each dough ball into a circle. Transfer each to a pizza peel or the back of a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Spread half of pesto all the way across each pizza, and generously scatter topping (along with the flavored oil it was cooked in) across the top.

9. Slide pizza with parchment paper onto pizza stone or heated baking sheet, and bake until crust is golden brown about 10 minutes.

Per serving: 240 calories; 12 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 7 mg cholesterol; 6g protein; 27 g carbohydrate; 4 g sugar; 3 g fiber; 915 mg sodium; 98 mg calcium

— Dough recipe from "Robert's Cookbook" by Carlo Mirarchi, Brandon Hoy, Chris Parachini and Katherine Wheelock; topping recipe by Daniel Neman

DETROIT PIZZA

Detroit's pizza's distinctive shape is directly related to its city of origin: The rectangular baking pans were originally created to serve as automotive drip pans or as trays to hold tools and parts.

Yield: 8 servings

For the dough

- 1 cup lukewarm water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups plus 1 tablespoon (290 grams) all-purpose flour
- 3/4 teaspoon instant yeast
- For the pizza sauce**
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano, crushed
- 1 tablespoon dried basil, crushed
- 1 1/2 teaspoons finely minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

Toppings

- 1/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- 8 slices pepperoni, optional
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 2 cups shredded brick cheese, muenster, Monterey Jack or more mozzarella
- 1 pinch dried oregano
- 1 pinch salt
- Note: Brick cheese is a type of cheese; it is not any cheese that comes in the shape of a brick.**