

Cherry Tomato & Basil Focaccia

Season: Summer

Makes: 30 tastes in the classroom
or 6 at home

Fresh from the garden: basil, cherry tomatoes

A focaccia is an Italian flat loaf of chewy bread with a crispy outside and a spongy centre. This recipe provides a tactile experience, kneading the sticky dough. Unlike other doughs, please resist the urge to add more flour during the kneading process, as the sticky dough will come together with time and persistence. The water content is important to achieve the focaccia's spongy centre and crispy outside.

Equipment:

metric measuring scales, jug and spoons
bowls – 1 medium, 2 large
fork
pastry brush
2 clean tea towels
baking tray, deep
baking paper
chopping board
bread knife
serving platter



Ingredients:

400 g lukewarm water
1 tsp honey
7 g dried yeast
600 g bread flour
1 tsp salt, plus a pinch
4 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for oiling the bowl
25 cherry tomatoes
25 basil leaves

Instructions:

1. Activate the dry yeast by placing it with the water and honey in the medium bowl and mixing with a fork. Leave it in a warm place for 5 to 10 minutes. It will start to look frothy as the yeast ferments the sugar into carbon dioxide.
2. Place the flour and salt into a large bowl. Create a well in the centre. Add the yeast mixture into the well. Use the tips of your fingers to incorporate the yeast mixture into the flour, mixing just until the dough clings together into a shaggy dough.
3. Add 1 tbsp of the olive oil over the shaggy dough. Cover the bowl with a clean tea towel and rest for 5 minutes or overnight in the fridge.
4. Form the shaggy dough into a ball and tip onto a clean, dry workbench. Start kneading with your hands flat to minimise the dough sticking to them. Knead the dough for at least 5 minutes until it can be shaped into a ball that is likely still sticky when you touch it. (The dough might become very sticky. By keeping the dough moving, the gluten in the flour will absorb the water and a tacky ball should form. Resist the urge to add more flour; if it becomes too uncomfortable, clean your hands, lightly cover them with a little oil and return to kneading the dough.)
5. Use the pastry brush to lightly oil a large bowl and place the dough in the bowl. Drizzle 1 tbsp of oil over the top of the dough. Cover the bowl with a tea towel and leave for 15 minutes in a warm spot.

6. Preheat the oven to 200°C.
7. Using your fingers, pick the dough up from the far side of the bowl and pull it towards you, folding it into the centre of the bowl. Turn the bowl 90 degrees and repeat three more times. Turn the dough upside down. Cover the bowl with a tea towel and leave for 10 minutes in a warm spot.
8. Line a baking tray with baking paper. Tip the dough onto the baking tray. Spread the dough out into a rectangle shape that is about 2 cm thick.
9. Drizzle 2 tbsp olive oil over the dough. Make indentations in the dough using your fingertips so it is completely covered in indentations. Place a basil leaf over some of the indentations. Place a cherry tomato on top of each basil leaf and push the cherry tomato and basil deep into the dough so they touch the bottom of the baking tray. Leave for 10 minutes in a warm spot.
10. Sprinkle with a pinch of salt and bake in the oven for 20 minutes or until golden brown.
11. Remove the baking tray from the oven and allow the focaccia to cool. Transfer to a chopping board, cut into slices and place it on a serving platter.

