



Grains of truth about PIZZA

Definitions

Pizza, just as American as baseball and apple pie, is a modern favorite all over the world. Pizza is a baked pie of Italian origin consisting of a shallow bread-like crust covered with seasoned tomato sauce, cheese and often other toppings, such as a variety of meats and vegetables. Pizza makers have tried virtually every kind of topping on pizza including peanut butter & jelly.

Around the world, toppings vary greatly to reflect regional preferences. In Japan, for instance, eel and squid are favorites; in Pakistan, curry is a big seller; in Russia, red herring is a topping of choice; Australians enjoy shrimp and pineapple on their pizzas; Costa Ricans favor coconut¹, but here in the United States, pepperoni is the favorite pizza topping.²

History

Almost 3000 years of food evolution has taken place for the pizza pie to reach its current delicious state today. Although flat breads have been around for 6000 years, the word “pizziare” started appearing in Italian writings as far back as 1000 B.C. The word pizza itself is believed to have originated from an “Old Italian” word meaning “a point,” which in turn became the Italian word “pizziare,” which means to pinch, or to pluck.³

Tomatoes were first introduced to Italy from South America in 1522. At first the tomato was believed to be poisonous. Fortunately, the poorer peasants of the region finally overcame their doubts about tomatoes in the 17th century and began adding it to the bread dough, and the first pizzas were created.³

As the popularity of the tomato became widespread, mozzarella cheese was slowly gaining ground. Mozzarella had become available in Italy only after water buffalo were imported from India in the 7th century, (mozzarella was first made with water buffalo milk). Its popularity grew very slowly until the last half of the 18th century, but the cheese and tomatoes did not meet on a pizza until 1889.⁴

In the later half of the 19th century, pizza migrated to America with the Italians. By the turn of the century, the Italian immigrants had begun to open their own bakeries and were selling groceries as well as pizza. Gennaro Lombardi opened the first true U.S. pizzeria in 1905 at 53 α Spring Street in New York City, a part of town known as “Little Italy.”⁵

Nutritional value

Pizza can be made with anything from the healthiest ingredients to ingredients high in fat. A couple pieces of pizza can be a nutritious dinner, or a day’s supply of fat. Making pizza at home can give you the advantage of controlling high fat ingredients, but you can eat healthy pizza from commercial pizzas as well. Learn to order your pizza with mostly vegetables and fewer high fat ingredients for a healthier meal.

DOUGH: Pizza can be made with a variety of breads. Focaccia is great to use as well as French breads and English muffins. Pitas, pizza rolls, thin crust, thick crust, stuffed crust and pan style crust are some of the many forms used for making pizza. If you are short on time, boxed mixes, refrigerated or frozen pizza doughs can make for a quick meal. By using your imagination, there is no end to what you can create.

SAUCES: There are a wide variety of sauces used to create your pizza pie. Supermarkets readily carry canned and jarred tomato pizza sauces. Tomato pizza sauce is no longer the exclusive pizza crust cover-up. Although the tomato sauce is more often calorie friendly, barbeque, Alfredo, salsa, peanut and pesto sauces, have gained wide spread consumer acceptance.

CHEESE: Mozzarella cheese is still the favorite cheese topping and is lower in fat content if you purchase skim and low-fat varieties. An array of cheeses either alone or mixed together, provides delicious and different tasting pies. Get creative and blend cheeses to pump up the flavor, try cheddar and Monterey Jack, provolone, smoked mozzarella and parmesan, feta and parmesan or mozzarella and fontina. Remember, the harder the cheese, the higher the fat content.

TOPPINGS: For lighter toppings, use ground turkey, turkey pepperoni and lean meats. Roasted white chicken meat is especially good with a light garlic sauce. Don't forget to add your favorite vegetables. From broccoli to eggplant and zucchini to spinach, there is no end to what an imaginative mind can create. Make a mushroom pizza using portabella, white and shiitake mushrooms. Add a little garlic, onion and red peppers sautéed in olive oil. The combinations of toppings are endless.

DESSERT PIZZAS: Dessert pizzas are also popular with consumers. Construct your own special dessert by using a shortbread recipe for the crust or refrigerated cookie dough. Brush the baked crust with warm jam or jelly topped with your favorite fruit. Sprinkle with powdered sugar or crumbled cookies over the fruit.

Storage

Pizza is easy to store. Wrap in aluminum foil and put in the refrigerator. Do not store more than a couple days. To freeze, wrap tightly in an airtight container, use within 30 days. Thaw, in the refrigerator, before re-heating.

Re-Heating

When re-heating pizza from a pizza chain, use the directions they provide on the box. If no directions are provided, pre-heat oven to 350 degrees and place the pizza in aluminum foil and close. Warm in oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until cheese is bubbly. If the crust is thick you might need to heat a little longer. For the microwave, place a slice on a paper plate or microwavable plate. Set microwave for one minute at 70 percent power. Do not overcook the pizza in the microwave or the crust will become tough.

Recipes

Bread Machine Pizza Dough

Recipe (1½ pounds) fits 1 (14-inch) or 2 (12-inch) pizza pan(s):

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons water at room temperature (70° – 80°)

1 teaspoon salt

1½ tablespoons olive oil

3 cups bread flour*

2 tablespoons instant dry milk

1½ teaspoons bread machine yeast

Cornmeal

Combine first six ingredients according to the manufacturer's directions for your machine. Process on the dough cycle. During the initial mixing period, check that the dough comes away from the sides of the pan.

Remove dough from bread machine pan. Grease appropriate pan(s); sprinkle with cornmeal. Roll or pat dough to fit pan(s). Bake approximately 15 minutes at 375 degrees F or until lightly browned. Spread with your favorite sauce; add cheeses and your desired toppings. Bake an additional 15 to 20 minutes until all of the toppings are thoroughly heated.

**Whole-Wheat Pizza Dough:* Replace 1-cup bread flour with ½-cup whole-wheat flour in recipe.

Fruit Delight Pizza Pie

1 – 18 ounce refrigerated sugar cookie dough

½ cup sliced bananas

½ cup sliced fresh strawberries

½ cup crushed pineapple, drained

½ cup sliced kiwi fruit

8 ounce container frozen whipped topping, thawed

1 – 3 ounce pkg. instant vanilla pudding

10 vanilla wafers

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Press cookie dough evenly around a 12-inch pizza pan and bake 12 to 15 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool. Fold the vanilla pudding mix into the whipped topping; spread over cooled crust. Arrange fruit in a decorative color pattern. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Crumble the vanilla wafers and sprinkle over the top.

¹Pizza Industry Facts; PizzaWare®

²Pizza Facts; PIZZA TODAY Magazine

³History of Pizza; http://ma.essortment.com/historyofpizza_rxup.htm

⁴The History of Pizza; www.ghg.net/covej/history.htm

⁵Pie History; www.geraldos.com/piehistory.htm

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