GENERAL

paul hollywood focaccia bread recipe

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Paul Hollywood Focaccia Bread Recipe: A Classic Italian Delight

When it comes to baking, few names resonate with the same authority as Paul Hollywood. Known worldwide for his expertise on the TV show *The Great British Bake Off*, Hollywood has a knack for turning simple ingredients into culinary masterpieces. His focaccia bread recipe, in particular, has become a favorite for home bakers looking to bring a slice of Italy into their kitchens. This article will walk you through every step of creating Paul Hollywood's iconic focaccia, share tips for achieving that perfect golden crust, and offer creative variations to keep your bread menu exciting.

Who Is Paul Hollywood?

Paul Hollywood, born in 1963, is a celebrated British baker, author, and television personality. He trained as a pastry chef before making his mark as a judge on *The Great British Bake Off*. With over 25 books to his name, Hollywood has shared countless recipes, from croissants to artisan bread, that emphasize technique, flavor, and presentation. His focus on high quality ingredients and precise measurements has earned him a reputation as a master of both traditional and modern baking.

His focaccia bread recipe is no exception. It blends the rustic simplicity of Italian baking with Hollywood's meticulous approach to dough development, resulting in a loaf that is airy, flavorful, and irresistibly fragrant.

Why Paul Hollywood's Focaccia Stands Out

- Balanced Flavors: The recipe balances salty, sweet, and savory notes with a subtle hint of sweetness from the sugar.
- Light, Airy Texture: Proper fermentation and a generous amount of olive oil produce a tender crumb and a crisp crust.
- Versatile Toppings: The dough serves as a canvas for a wide range of herbs, olives, onions, and more.
- Easy to Follow: Even novice bakers can achieve professional results with clear instructions.

With this foundation, let's dive into the details that make Paul Hollywood's focaccia a must try.

Ingredients

Below is the full list of ingredients you'll need to craft this classic focaccia. Feel free to adjust quantities slightly if you're scaling the recipe up or down.

1. 500 /g strong bread flour (about 4 cups)
2. 10 /g salt (about 2 teaspoons)
3. 5 /g instant yeast (about 1 teaspoon)
4. 300 /ml warm water (about 1 /¼ cups)
5. 30 /ml olive oil (about 2 tablespoons) plus extra for drizzling
6. 1 /tsp sugar
7. Optional toppings: rosemary, sea salt flakes, cherry tomatoes, caramelized onions, olives, or grated parmesan

Equipment Needed

- Large mixing bowl
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Digital kitchen scale (for precision)
- Rubber spatula or dough hook
- Clean kitchen towel or plastic wrap
- Baking sheet or silicone baking mat
- Oven preheated to 220 /°C (425 /°F)
- Paper towels for drying

Step by Step Preparation

1. Mix the Dry Ingredients

In a large bowl, whisk together the bread flour, salt, and instant yeast until evenly distributed. This ensures the yeast is evenly dispersed, promoting uniform fermentation.

2. Combine Wet Ingredients

In a separate container, mix the warm water, sugar, and 30 /ml of olive oil. Stir until the sugar dissolves completely.

3. Form the Dough

Pour the wet mixture into the dry ingredients. Use a rubber spatula or your hands to bring the mixture together into a rough dough. The dough should be slightly sticky but manageable.

4. First Rise (Bulk Fermentation)

Cover the bowl with a damp kitchen towel or plastic wrap. Let the dough rise at room temperature for about 1 hour, or until it has doubled in size. This initial fermentation develops flavor and structure.

5. Shape the Focaccia

Transfer the dough onto a lightly floured surface. Gently press it into a rectangle that fits your baking sheet. Use your fingertips to create dimples across the surface; this traditional technique helps the dough rise evenly and creates a characteristic pattern.

6. Second Rise

Cover the shaped dough again with a towel and allow it to rise for an additional 30 minutes. The dough should look puffed and airy.

7. Preheat the Oven

While the dough finishes its second rise, preheat your oven to 220 °C (425 °F). A hot oven is essential for achieving a crisp crust.

8. Add Toppings and Olive Oil

Drizzle a generous amount of olive oil over the dough’s surface, ensuring it seeps into the dimples. Sprinkle your chosen toppings—rosemary, sea salt, tomatoes, onions, olives, or parmesan—over the dough. The olive oil not only adds flavor but also prevents the toppings from sticking to the pan.

9. Bake

Place the baking sheet in the preheated oven and bake for 20–25 minutes, or until the focaccia turns a

golden brown color. If you prefer a darker crust, bake for an additional 2–3 minutes.

10. Cool and Serve

Remove the focaccia from the oven and let it cool on a wire rack for at least 10 minutes. Slice and serve warm or at room temperature. Enjoy it as an accompaniment to soups, salads, or as a sandwich base.

Baking Tips & Tricks

- Use a Pizza Stone: If you have a pizza stone, place it in the oven during preheating. Baking on the stone gives the focaccia an even, crisp bottom.
- Temperature Matters: A higher oven temperature (220 /°C) ensures a quick rise and a golden crust. Avoid lowering the temperature, which can result in a soggy base.
- Don't Overmix: Once the dough is formed, avoid excessive kneading. Overworking can develop too much gluten, making the bread tough.
- Fresh Yeast: While instant yeast works well, you can also use active dry yeast for a slightly longer fermentation time and deeper flavor.
- Room Temperature Dough: Let the dough rise at room temperature rather than in the fridge. Cold dough can inhibit proper expansion.

Creative Variations

Paul Hollywood's focaccia recipe offers a solid base that can be customized to suit any palate. Here are some popular variations:

Herb & Garlic Focaccia

Replace rosemary with a mixture of thyme, oregano, and minced garlic. Add a pinch of crushed red pepper for a subtle kick.

Sun Dried Tomato & Basil

Scatter chopped sun dried tomatoes and fresh basil leaves over the dough before baking. The tomatoes add a sweet, tangy burst, while basil imparts aromatic freshness.

Cheesy Focaccia

Sprinkle grated mozzarella or cheddar on top of the dough before baking. The cheese melts into a gooey, golden crust.

Olive & Fennel Focaccia

Incorporate sliced black olives and fennel seeds into the dough for a Mediterranean twist. The fennel gives a subtle licorice flavor that complements the olives.

Sweet Focaccia

For a dessert version, replace the sugar with a tablespoon of honey and add dried fruit such as raisins or chopped dates. Finish with a drizzle of honey after baking.

Serving Suggestions

- As an Appetizer: Serve warm with a side of marinara or a tangy yogurt dip.
- Sandwich Base: Use focaccia slices to make gourmet sandwiches with roast beef, arugula, and horseradish sauce.

- Accompaniment: Pair with soups, stews, or a simple Caesar salad.
- Party Snack: Cut into bite size squares and serve with a selection of dips like hummus, pesto, or tapenade.

Storage & Shelf Life

Focaccia stays fresh for up to 3 days when stored in an airtight container at room temperature. For longer storage, freeze the bread in a freezer bag; thaw at room temperature or reheat in a 180 °C (350 °F) oven for a few minutes to restore crispness.

Common Mistakes & Troubleshooting

- Too Dense Dough: If the dough feels heavy, you may have overmixed or used too much flour. Try adding a tablespoon of water to loosen the mixture.
- Flat Bread: Insufficient rise time or a too cold oven can lead to a flat loaf. Ensure the dough is fully risen and the oven is preheated.
- Dry Top: Not enough olive oil or topping can dry out the surface. Drizzle generously before baking.
- Burnt Edges: Bake at a slightly lower temperature or move the baking sheet to a lower rack to prevent over browning.
- Stale Crumb: Store in a sealed container to maintain moisture; otherwise, the bread will dry out quickly.

Final Thoughts

Paul Hollywood’s focaccia bread recipe exemplifies how simple ingredients, precise technique, and a little creativity can produce a truly memorable loaf. Whether you stick to the classic rosemary and sea salt or experiment with bold flavors, this recipe is a reliable foundation for countless variations. By following the steps outlined above, you’ll be able to bake a focaccia that rivals those found in Italian trattorias—golden, fragrant, and irresistibly soft inside.

So gather your ingredients, preheat that oven, and let the aroma of fresh focaccia fill your kitchen. Buon appetito!

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