

Focaccia di Recco

Makes 2

Everyone loves the smell of baking focaccia. I enjoy making it when my family comes over or I have other guests. I often put out a large antipasto spread as an appetizer, and my freshly baked focaccia adds an extra-special homemade touch to the spread. I often bake it plain, but sometimes I top it with tomatoes, or olives, or onions . . . or all three! Focaccia is popular all over Italy. It can have different toppings, seasonings, and textures depending on the region, but one of my favorites, different and super-delicious, is the focaccia di Recco. Recco is a city on the Ligurian coast, near Genova, known for its focaccia as well as for pansotti (a special kind of pasta dressed with walnut sauce) and the famous trofiette pasta with pesto. If you happen to be in the area in September, you can watch a spectacular fireworks display and enjoy the specialties and delicious street food along the beautiful Riviera. This focaccia is a bit different: it is not topped, but, rather, filled with stracchino, a cow's milk cheese from the north of Italy, which is not aged, eaten young, and usually has no rind. It is a soft cheese with a mild, delicate flavor.

1 1/4 pounds stracchino or crescenza cheese
2 cups bread flour, plus more as needed
1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for sprinkling
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for the pans and as needed

Break up the cheese by pulling it apart a bit, in a strainer lined with cheesecloth over a bowl. Let it drain in the refrigerator for a couple of hours.

Combine the flour and salt in the food processor, and pulse to combine. Combine 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons cold water and 1/3 cup olive oil in a spouted measuring cup. With the processor running, add the water mixture, and process until the mixture forms a loose ball on the blade. Continue to process until the dough is smooth and elastic, about 1 minute. Put the dough on a floured counter, knead it a few times to bring it together, and wrap it in plastic wrap. Let it rest at room temperature for 1 hour.

Preheat your oven to 500 degrees (or as high as it will go).

Brush two 11-to-12-inch pizza pans liberally with a tablespoon of olive oil each. Divide the dough into quarters. Roll or stretch one piece of dough into an 11-to-12-inch round. (Roll it as thin as possible without its tearing, as thin as pasta dough if you can.) Set that piece of dough in one pizza pan, and drop half of the cheese in small lumps over the top, leaving a scant 1-inch border. Brush the edge of the border with water. Roll out a second piece of dough in the same way, and lay it over the top of the first. Press the edges to seal. (For a neater look, you can run a pizza cutter around the border to make a perfect round.) Cut a few small slits in the top of the dough to help steam escape. Brush with olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Repeat with the remaining ingredients in the second pan.

Bake on the bottom rack until the bottom and top of each focaccia is crisp and golden, 16 to 18 minutes. Brush once more, liberally, with olive oil, and serve warm.