

POP:

...cooking notes on how Pinnacle Ridge Winery makes such good pizza...!

Pinnacle Ridge Winery has numerous food and wine events throughout the year. Occasionally we make pizza to pair with various wines and we always get asked for our pizza “recipe.” I’ve resisted trying to publish a “recipe” because I don’t think you can make pizza with a recipe. So instead..... I am going to share my **Philosophy of Pizza** (POP).

I grew up in the Midwest where Chicago-style deep dish pizza is the king. For many years this was my model of the ideal pizza, however, as I grew older and the battle of the bulge became a true battle I’ve moved to thinner crusts so that the ratio of dough to toppings has reduced. Thus, these notes will describe how to make a thin crust pizza.

So after all these musings about not having a recipe - let’s start with the crust. The list of ingredients is simple – **bread flour, yeast, salt, extra virgin olive oil, and warm water.**

At the winery, we typically target relatively small pizzas so that the dough is easier to handle (say 12” diameter or so). I typically will take around **one cup of warm water** and add a **tablespoon of yeast** to it and let the yeast hydrate for 5 minutes or so. The yeast and warm water is then added to around **1 ½ cups of flour with some olive oil.** The amount of oil you use depends on the type of crust that you like. If you want a more chewy, bread-like crust then use a small amount of oil (say one tablespoon or less). If you like a crust that is not as chewy as bread and breaks easier - use more oil (say 2-4 tablespoons).

I like to begin to blend the flour, water and oil mixture and then introduce the **salt.** Again, this is a personal preference issue but I would say around one tablespoon is appropriate for pizza. Mix the flour/water/yeast/oil/salt mixture in a bowl with a wooden spoon (the wooden spoon is critical for that old world feel) until reasonably well blended.

The mixture will probably be too wet to handle so slowly add **flour** until it is difficult to stir with a spoon. Next, turn the dough out onto a floured surface and begin kneading the dough. Continue adding flour until the dough is no longer very sticky. I prefer a fairly soft dough so that it is easier to form into a thin disk so avoid adding too much flour otherwise the dough will be more difficult to form. I typically knead the dough for around five minutes. The dough will develop a firm feel and will be totally uniform in consistency after kneading. Place the dough in a very light greased bowl and cover with a towel and place in a relatively warm place (no – this does not mean in a 350 degree oven) to sit.

The dough will increase in size and become lighter as time progresses. The dough can be used as soon as it **doubles in volume** (takes approximately an hour or so) or it can be placed in the fridge and held overnight and brought out the next day and warmed up and used. The flavors of the dough will be different depending on how long you hold it, but I have enjoyed both methods. This amount of dough will typically make 2-3 pizzas depending on how big the pizzas are and how thick the dough is.

Once you have determined that the dough is ready for working, then it needs to be formed into the traditional round shape. I spread some extra virgin olive oil on a slate countertop and put the dough on the countertop and begin working it into the round shape. The trick to this is to do a little shaping at a time and then let the dough rest so that the dough has time to adapt to the new shape. The longer you take, the easier it is to get the dough into the round shape (a typical time frame is 20 minutes or so, shape, rest 5 minutes, shape, rest 5 minutes etc). You want to make sure that you use enough oil on your work surface so that the dough does not stick. You want the dough to be fairly thin so that the final pizza is not too bready.

Okay, at this point we have our dough spread out on a countertop in the shape that we want our pizza to be (say 12" or so). I prefer to bake the pizza in a very hot oven (450 degrees) on a pizza stone. Using the pizza stone helps to produce a crispy crust but also reduces burning the crust from the bottom due to direct radiation from the heating elements in the oven. So the trick will be to transfer the pizza (and toppings) onto the stone from the countertop. But first, what I do is to get the crust onto a large wooden board (a pizza peel, a large round wooden board with a handle) is ideal. I use either semolina or corn meal on the board so that the pizza dough does not stick to the wood. Once the dough is on the peel make sure that you can slide the dough around on the board. If the dough sticks in spots, use a large spatula to separate the dough from the wood and spread more corn meal on the board if necessary until you can easily slide the dough around on the board. If the dough sticks to the wood you'll have a mess trying to transfer the pizza onto the stone. Once you have the dough on the wood and it is not sticking, then you can add your toppings.

Toppings – I prefer what I consider traditional pizza toppings. Things that you will not find on a Pinnacle Ridge Winery Pizza are ham, pineapple, bacon, broccoli, avocados, or small children (Just kidding!). Other toppings that you will find on a Pinnacle Ridge Winery Pizza are sausage, pepperoni, raw-diced tomatoes, garlic, ricotta, mozzarella, olives, onions, red peppers, green peppers, yellow peppers, mushrooms, parmesan, asiago, etc.

I use a minimal amount of tomato and prefer raw tomato as opposed to a heavy cooked tomato sauce. I take whole canned Italian tomatoes, drain them, then take the hard stem-end off of the tomato and squeeze out all of the juice from inside the tomato. You're left with the meat of the tomato at this point. I tear it up by hand and then use a stick blender and lightly puree them. Sometimes I'll add some raw garlic to the pureed tomatoes.

Other vegetables are sliced (deseeded if necessary) and sautéed with extra virgin olive oil to soften them a bit. Mozzarella does not have to be grated but can be used after cutting into thin rectangles or squares.

A typical Pinnacle Ridge Winery Pizza's toppings would be the following: Lay down a thin layer of ricotta cheese as a base (maybe a ¼ or ½ cup on a single pizza). Follow with rectangles of mozzarella (maybe 1/3 to ½ lbs of cheese). Dollops of raw, tomato sauce can follow, but don't overdo the tomato. Onions next; then pepperoni; followed by some yellow peppers; and then a topping of parmesan. You want to avoid piling on too many toppings or the pizza will be unbalanced and hard to move around on the wooden board. Keep them small in amount and thinly layered for the desired end result.

So at this point you have your crust on a board with the toppings in place. Your oven is hot and has been preheated with the pizza stone for half an hour (so that the stone is thoroughly hot). The next step is tricky. Gently, but quickly, move the wooden board to see if the pizza is "stuck" to the board or not. If it is slightly stuck then use your large spatula to "unstick" it. Open the oven. Pull the rack with stone out a bit and gently but quickly slide the pizza off of the board onto the stone. Obviously it works best if you get all of the pizza on the stone as opposed to half on the stone and half hanging off of the stone. This can take some practice and skill.

Bake the pizza until the crust is crisp, is browning, the cheese is melting and everything is sizzling (I find this occurs around 13-15 minutes). Once the pizza is done, then slide it out onto a wooden board using a large spatula. At this point it is relatively easy to handle. Allow to cool for several minutes, then slice it up and enjoy.

And if we're not cooking for an event in our Tasting Room, I'll typically make 2-4 pizzas for an evening meal and enjoy the leftovers for breakfast or lunch the next day. Enjoy with any of our wines but in particular our PINOT NOIR or our blend, the QUAFF, affectionately known as our pizza wine.

- Brad Knapp, Winemaker