

MOVE OVER *Deep Dish*

Making thin crust pizza at home
is a hot new party trend

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IT'S MOVED FROM whisper campaign to open truth: Deep dish is for tourists. Real Chicagoans eat thin crust. Local pizzerias are steering away from their deep-dish roots and reaching all the way back to the old country for recipes. Artisan pies, modeled on varieties from Rome to Naples, are popping out of custom pizza ovens across town. ¶ The recently opened Pizzeria Via Stato bakes one of the city's best thin crusts—a savory take on cracker-style Roman crusts cooked in a wicked-hot gas oven and kept crispy served on mesh metal pie plates. Nearby in River North, La Madia anchors its hand-formed pizzas with upscale ingredients, such as wild mushrooms and truffle oil. At the new A Mano in the Near North Side neighborhood, chef John Caputo is making Neapolitan-Roman hybrids—thin but chewy crusts with homemade lamb meatballs (see recipes) or shaved prosciutto on top—in a wood oven that fires from 750 to 1,000 degrees. And in the Ravenswood area, Spacca Napoli's pies have the blessing of the *L'associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana*, the agency that guards Naples traditional pizza by dictating ingredients and methods. ¶ As good as they are to eat out, thin-crust, artisan pies can be just as fun and easy at home. Pizza-making parties, in fact, are the no-brainer secret of chefs the city over. A Mano's Caputo supplies dough and toppings to guests while he mans the oven. Chef Jeff Adamek of Wolfgang Puck Catering puts his pizza stone on a Weber grill, which adds a smoky element to his parties' pies.





OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE Provide your guests with a smorgasbord of fresh toppings, and don't be afraid to stray from the ordinary. BELOW This hearty Lamb Polpetta pizza is a creation from John Caputo, executive chef at A Mano. THIS PAGE If you're short on time, use a pre-made pizza crust, such as those found at Trader Joe's. For a break from red sauce, spread a little bit of Caputo's Garlic Confit Purée onto your crusts.



SET the Scene

SERVE casual but elegant wines—in carafes, please. Brian Duncan, beverage director at A Mano, recommends a Pinot Grigio from Giovanni Puiatti, a Sauvignon Blanc from Beckmen or Brander, and Nero d'Avola wines from Sicily.

ARRANGE the ingredients beautifully in bowls, and think elegant simplicity for your centerpieces. Try a cream-colored ceramic bowl filled with fresh artichokes or tomatoes on the vine.

FINISH WITH shots of limoncello, grappa, or espresso with fruit and Italian cookies for dessert.



Despite its reputation for simplicity, the homemade pizza—like the mighty hamburger before it—comes piled with an array of cooking commandments. First and foremost, thou shalt respect the foundation. “In order to be a great pizza the crust has to be great,” Caputo says. “It’s like a sandwich. You can have great ingredients, but it’s only going to be good with great bread.”

Of course, like every culinary skill, it takes practice to create the perfect dough. Caputo lets his dough rise twice, and often lets it rest for 24 hours in the refrigerator before using. Jonathan Goldsmith, chef-owner of Spacca Napoli, likes to work over the dough for at least 45 minutes and then slice it with a sharp knife to check for fully-formed air pockets. Others work the pizza dough into a circular disk, careful not to push the air out.

Whatever method you use to make your thin-crust dough, remember two dictums: a longer rise means less yeast, for a pizza that’s easier on the stomach, and less is more when it comes to toppings.

“You want to make everything on that pizza comparable to the thinness of the pie,” Caputo says. “You have to hold back to keep it in balance.”

Despite the expert suggestions, pizza is a forgiving food to make. “It’s a fun way to party,” says Adamek, whose most recent gathering featured a global buffet that included Italian smoked mozzarella, Mexican ancho-chile-infused tomato sauce, and Greek olives. “Everyone gets to be creative and it’s fun to see what each person comes out with.”

Homemade pizza parties are easy to host. Other than a pizza stone and an oven you can crank to at least 450 degrees (550 if you can), you don’t need any special equipment. Simply provide enough floured cutting boards to allow several people to work at once and use a flat cookie sheet as a pizza peel to move individual pies into the oven. Most of the ingredients can be store bought, though homemade pizza sauce, meatballs, garlic puree, and other additions will, of course, only improve the results. And—psst!—if you don’t want to make the dough you can buy it fresh at stores like Trader Joe’s. Supplement with a salad or two and you’ve got a fuss-free interactive evening.

Buon appetito! **MH**

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FOR RECIPES, PAGE 92. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FEATURED PRODUCTS AND SUPPLIERS, SEE PAGE 90.

