

PIZZA Pizazz!

Smoke and fire breathe new life into an old favorite



Having prepped ingredients and cooking tools at your fingertips helps keep things organized and efficient once the grilling begins.

BY HOLLY HERRICK
Of The Post and Courier Staff

The morning that pizza grilling day arrived, I awoke with a sense of intense trepidation. Having never considered myself much of a grill master and having never grilled a pizza, I spent about 10 days researching the matter before doing it. Despite being armed with oodles of information and a brand-new grill I purchased just for the event, I couldn't shake recurring images of melting pizza dough, collapsing into an oozing, gooey mess before the first photograph was taken.

MARKET WHIMSY

It didn't happen. I found that grilling pizza is actually easy — that is, if you are well prepared and organized before it's time to place the dough over the flame. It's well worth the effort. The grill imparts a luscious smokiness and crunch to the dough that's unlike any other kind of pizza preparation I've sampled. And, because grilled pizza demands light quantities of toppings and aren't suited to sauces (to prevent sogginess), they're an ideal way to showcase the bright flavors of produce, from zucchini to tomatoes, now available at local farmers markets.

Before getting started, make a thorough inspection of your grill, whether it be the gas or briquette variety. It's imperative that the grill grate be very clean and free of any accumulated burned bits that can be sticky business when it's time to flip the pizza.

If you're making your own pizza dough, count on about 2½ hours of prep time. Spend the two hours it takes for the dough to rise prepping toppings you'll be using. Vegetables should be sliced whisper-thin and depleted of as much excess water as possible, either through partially cooking or salting appropriate vegetables (such as squash), and rinsing and pressing out any excess water. The reasons are twofold.

First, extra water can render a grilled pizza soggy. Also, the toppings only received indirect heat and for a very short period (two to three minutes) of time, so they need to be virtually ready to eat before they even make it to the grill.

Bolder-flavored, drier (aged) cheeses (such as parmesan, aged mozzarella, cheddar and others) do best on the grill. These, too, should be grated finely to ensure that they melt entirely during the few minutes they're exposed to heat.

Herbs such as basil, rosemary and thyme also should be prepped. It's best to put each in a separate bowl, covered and refrigerated until you're ready to take them outside to begin cooking.

Pizza dough for grilling needs to be prepared with bread flour — no exceptions can be made here if you desire a crispy crust. The higher protein content of the flour works with the yeast to provide the structural support the dough needs. I sampled a couple of pizza dough recipes and found that the one that contained some fresh herbs and sauteed garlic (see recipe on Page 4D) worked best. The grilling really brought out the flavor of both and provided an excellent bed for the sweet, summer vegetable toppings.

Rolling out the dough, as opposed to shaping it, helps prevent unsightly bubbles from forming once it's on the grill.

See PIZZA, Page 4D



BRAD NETTLES/STAFF

Market-fresh tomatoes take on new heights on this grilled tomato pizza with basil and gouda cheese.

FRESH & HOT

EVO's portable wood-burning pizza oven's latest sensation at local farmers markets

BY HOLLY HERRICK
Of The Post and Courier Staff

Made-to-order pizza topped with fresh produce from local farmers' fields and baked in a wood-burning oven is the latest, tasty find at some area farmers markets.

EVO (Extra Virgin Oven, LLC) is why.

The business was the joint idea of co-owners Ricky Hacker and Matt McIntosh. Hacker, previously sous chef at FIG restaurant, and McIntosh, previously with Normandy Farms, wanted to put their penchant for fresh produce and cooking experience to use in a new kind of way.

McIntosh took a class in Minnesota several years ago where he learned



HOLLY HERRICK/STAFF

Freshly assembled pizzas come hot out of EVO's wood-burning oven, ready to eat, in just minutes.

See EVO, Page 5D

PIZZA Pizzazz!

PIZZA from Page 1D

About 30 minutes or so before you are ready to start, roll out the dough into small 8- to 9-inch rounds (any larger and it's too hard to handle) and stack each between well-floured layers of wax paper. I found the dough was easiest to work with cold and became problematic once it had been sitting in the sun for several minutes. I recommend taking out the chilled, rolled dough in batches you can handle, keeping in mind you'll likely only have one or two pizzas on the grill at any time.

The heat of the grill is also crucial. If too hot, the dough will scorch, and if too cool, the dough will ooze, melt and stick. Shoot for medium-high. You know you're there when you can hold your hands close to the heat source for a count of just three seconds before they get too hot. Once hot, the coals should be spread in a single layer on the bottom of the grill.

Now, you're ready to roll. Arrange all of your prepared toppings on a table in close proximity to the grill. You'll want to have tongs or a large, sturdy spatula for flipping, a fork to burst any potential bubbles that form in the dough as it cooks, olive oil, a brush to spread the oil on the dough before cooking to prevent sticking, a cutting board to use when topping the pizzas and an active imagination.

This is your show, and anything goes, but do remember to keep the toppings light (just two or three) or you'll wish you hadn't started.

Once the grill is medium hot, brush one dough round with a light coating of olive oil. Lift up the parchment or wax paper with both hands, and turn out the dough onto the center of the rack. Almost immediately, it will firm up and change texture.

This is the phase where you might see air bubbles that should be popped with your handy fork. The goal is to get slightly charred grill marks and an overall golden color. This takes about two minutes.

At this point, remove the dough from the grill and place it on the cutting board, cooked-side up, to add the toppings. If the board is small enough, you can slide the dough back onto the grill with this. My large, metal spatula also worked well.

Once returned, cover the grill. This seals in the heat (and the smoke) to melt the cheese and heat the toppings. This takes about three minutes. After that, take the pizza off the heat, eat and repeat.

The pizza is best just off the grill. I tried pre-grilling a few rounds of dough and finishing the pizza under the broiler of my oven but found the dough had lost a lot of its hot-off-the-grill texture.

Cooking this way is fun not just for the cook, but the onlooker. It's creative and delicious. I wouldn't want to do it for a large group, but a grilled pizza party for a small group of four to six people would be very manageable, tasty and fun.

Try some of local farmers markets produce on your own grilled pizza and you'll see what I mean.



Brushing down the prepared pizza dough with a light coating of olive oil is essential to help prevent the dough from sticking to the grate as it cooks.



It's important to prevent disfiguration as the pizza cooks on the grill by popping air bubbles that sometimes form.

and refrigerate up to 1 hour or until ready to use. (Pre-made pizza rounds can be prepared ahead, frozen, thawed and reshaped when ready to use).

— Recipe adapted from "The Best Recipe Grilling and Barbecue" cookbook, by the editors of Cook's Illustrated magazine.

This combination of flavors is sweet, light and refreshing. It's just perfect for summer dining. The mint can be substituted with just about any fresh herb. Basil, thyme or rosemary would work equally well.

Grilled Zucchini, Sweet Onion, Fresh Mint and Mozzarella Pizza

1 zucchini, sliced very thin
2 tablespoons sea salt
1 tablespoon olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper
4 to 6 prepared pizza dough rounds
Olive oil to brush
1 sweet onion, halved and thinly sliced
Several leaves fresh mint



Once the first side of the pizza is grilled, it is turned over and topped with a thin layer of ingredients. Afterward, it goes back on the grill to finish cooking and heat the toppings.

1 cup mozzarella, grated finely

Makes 4 to 6 (8-inch) pizzas.

Prepare the dough as previously described. Meanwhile, toss the sliced zucchini with the salt and place it over the sink in a colander to drain, about 15 minutes. Rinse thoroughly, drain and remove any excess water by lightly squeezing in a ball with your hands, or by pressing between paper towels. Set aside. Heat the olive oil in a medium-sized saute pan over medium heat. Add zucchini to the pan, toss to coat and season. Reduce heat to medium, and cook until tender-firm, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool to room temperature.

Brush the first side of the pizza lightly with olive oil and cook, 2 minutes. Remove from the grill and top the cooked side with a single layer of zucchini, a drizzle of onion, 2 torn fresh mint leaves and about ¼ cup of cheese, leaving a ½-inch border of dough uncovered. Season with salt and pepper. Return to the grill, cover



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRAD NETTLES/STAFF
The finished product, like this zucchini, onion and mint pizza with mozzarella, should have a crisp, golden crust and a tasty layer of grill-warmed toppings.

and cook until the cheese has melted, about 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

— Recipe by Holly Herrick

This recipe is close to the classic Margherita, but I substituted smoked gouda for mozzarella to build contrast with the sweetness of the tomatoes. Fresh basil always adds a welcome kick.

Grilled Tomato, Basil and Smoked Gouda Pizza

4 prepared pizza dough rounds
Olive oil for brushing
2 medium tomatoes, sliced very thin
3 tablespoons fresh basil, chopped lightly
1 cup smoked gouda cheese, grated
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Makes 4 (8-inch) pizzas.

Prepare the dough as previously described. Brush the first side of the dough with olive oil and cook on the grill for 2 minutes. Remove from the grill and top with a single layer of tomatoes, 2 to 3

slices. Scatter the fresh basil leaves on top, season and top with about ¼ cup of cheese, leaving a ½-inch border of dough uncovered. Return to the grill, cover and cook another 2 to 3 minutes, or until the pizza is cooked.

— Recipe by Holly Herrick

Grilled Pizza with Shrimp and Feta Cheese

1 recipe Garlic-Herb Pizza Dough (above)
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing on dough
6 medium garlic cloves, minced
4 teaspoons minced fresh oregano leaves
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and halved lengthwise
8 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (2 cups)

Makes 8 (8-inch) pizzas.

Prepare the dough as previously described. Light the grill. Combine ¼ cup oil, garlic, 2 teaspoons oregano, and salt and pepper to taste in a small bowl. Brush the first side of the dough with plain olive oil and cook each round, 2 minutes. Remove from the grill. Arrange a portion of the shrimp over each dough round, leaving a ½-inch border uncovered. Brush some herb oil over each pizza, making sure the shrimp are lightly brushed with oil, as well. Sprinkle cheese and the remaining 2 teaspoons of oregano over the shrimp. Slide the pizzas back onto the grill and cover. Grill, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately and repeat with the remaining dough rounds.

— Recipe adapted from "The Best Recipe Grilling & Barbecue" cookbook by the editors of Cook's Illustrated magazine.



HOLLY HERRICK/STAFF

Freshly prepared pizza is ready to go into EVO's custom-built, wood-burning oven for a quick, hot cook.

FRESH & HOT

EVO from Page 1D

how to build brick ovens. His background in baking, combined with a desire to bring "quality street vending" to Charleston, had a lot to do with finding the specialized pizza oven, according to McIntosh's wife, Mahwish. He pitched the pizza plan to Hacker, and they decided it was worth exploring.

Two years later, it's a reality.

The team found a manufacturer of specialty pizza carts in Pittsburgh. The "solo" pizza carts have a wood-burning oven on the top, storage components, room for refrigeration, storage and a work station. Because the oven is made from refractory concrete, it reaches up to 1,000 degrees in temperature. This indirect heat source, combined with direct heat of the hot stone of the oven's

hearth, ensures a crisp crust in just three to five minutes. The oven is entirely fueled by wood-burning heat from local oak, cherry and maple trees, which imparts a sultry, smoky flavor in the pizza.

EVO prepares several different pizzas, including fougasse, margherita, calzones and daily specials. The tomato sauce, pesto and aioli are homemade and prepped at a rented space at Normandy Farms before the cart starts rolling to market. Many of the seasonal toppings, such as spring onions, tomatoes, spinach, new potatoes, free-range eggs, baby leeks and basil, are purchased directly from local farmers, which marries beautifully with the purpose and mood of local markets.

EVO attends the Kiawah Open-air Market on Tuesday, I'On mar-

ket on Thursday, Myrtle Beach market on Friday, and the Charleston Farmers Market on Saturday. EVO also sells pizza at Park Circle Coffee & Cream in North Charleston, hosts special events and provides a catering service.

Pizzas come in regular-size (about 11 to 12 inches in diameter, \$8) and mini-size (about 8 inches, \$6-\$7).

Even though the pizzas cook ultra-fast in the extra hot oven, be willing to wait a few minutes for EVO's pizza. The oven can only accommodate three pizzas at a time, so it can be up to a brief 10-minute wait when the stand is busy. But time passes quickly while you shop, and the cool, green grass in the shade of a tree in Marion Square is just the place to savor the market's latest Neapolitan delight.