



Paul Mercurio's Spring Beer and Pizza

The great thing about pizza is that anything goes and I mean anything...I recently saw a dinner menu that finished with a Nutella, chocolate and cream cheese pizza! It is not uncommon to hear of people making pear and gorgonzola pizza, spam and cheese pizza, even macaroni and cheese pizza - but thankfully not too many people make the Korean Favourite of Ox Penis pizza! Hmmm I might pass on that one! The other great thing about pizza is spring. We can now finally dust off the Barbeque or Webber, pull out the pizza stone and invite some friends around for a few beers and some good old home made pizza. Or if you are lucky enough to have an Alfresco Wood Fired Oven then it's time to chop the wood, stoke the fire and make your dough. As for the toppings well 'almost' anything goes!

I thought I would share four pizzas that I regularly make and suggest the style of beer I would recommend to have with each. I live in Victoria and have access to some truly wonderful boutique beers which you will notice as my suggestions but on the same hand I don't have access to other truly wonderful beers being brewed in other states so I trust when you cook up one of these pizzas – or all of them - you will get a matching local micro brew to go with them.

Basic Pizza sauce:

1 onion finely chopped
2 cloves garlic finely chopped
2 – 3 tbls tomato paste
2 cans of chopped tomatoes
Pinch each of dried oregano and dried basil
½ cup of water
Salt and pepper

Fry onion and garlic in olive oil until translucent then add tomato paste a fry for a couple of minutes. Add tomatoes, water and herbs bring to the boil then season with salt and pepper. Gently simmer for half an hour or so – you don't want the sauce too thick or too thin so adjust with water if needed. If you want a smooth sauce you can blitz it with a stick blender or chuck in your food processor.



Basic Pizza dough:

650g of '00' flour or bread flour

1/2 tsp salt

350 ml of warm water

3 tsp dried yeast

Pinch of sugar

Olive oil

Put a good pinch of sugar and a splash of olive oil into the warm water and then the yeast – give it a stir and let it sit for 10 minutes while the yeast gets itself going. Put flour in a large mixing bowl and mix through the salt. Slowly add the yeasty water to the flour and mix until

you get a ball of dough – you may or may not use all the water, if you do use all the water and not all the flour is combined then add some more water to the dough. Turn the dough out onto a floured kitchen bench and give it a good kneading for 10 – 15 minutes until you feel the consistency and texture change.



Get another bowl large enough to fit the dough and either spray or wipe the inside with olive oil and then sprinkle flour in the bowl so that it sticks to the oil – this stops the dough from sticking to the bowl while it rises. Put the dough in the bowl and cover the top with cling wrap – spray and flour the inside surface that will touch the dough as it rises so that it doesn't stick too. Put in a warm place and let rise for as long as it takes – about an hour or two.

When dough has doubled in size take out of the bowl, roll into a log and cut into 6 equal portions, roll each portion into a ball, cover with flour and a tea towel until ready to roll out into a pizza base.

I love to use garlic flavoured olive oil - 3 cloves of garlic crushed into ½ cup of olive oil to baste the rim of the pizza dough so as to help form a flavourful crust.

Two important tips – use plenty of polenta sprinkled on the flat of the pizza paddle before you lay your rolled out pizza dough onto it – this makes sure the pizza once fully loaded up with toppings will slide off easily. And do spread hot tomato sauce on your dough or it will cause the dough to melt and stick to the paddle and then you will never slide it off into your oven! Once you have made your sauce let it cool down to at least room temperature before you use it.

Topping one: Rosemary and Garlic Pizza

This is enough for six pizzas.

8 cloves of garlic – peeled and crushed

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil

6 tablespoons of fresh rosemary leaves – peeled off the stalk

6 teaspoons of flaky salt – Maldon Salt or Murray River Pink Salt

Combine the crushed garlic in a bowl with the olive oil and give it a stir so as to get the garlic to release its flavour into the oil. Strip the rosemary leaves from the stalks and discard the stalks.

Use a pastry brush to brush your pizza trays with a little of the flavoured olive oil. Roll out your dough and place on the tray. Brush the top of the pizza dough with the olive oil making sure you scoop up bits of the crushed garlic leaving them scattered around the pizza. Scatter about 1 tablespoon of the rosemary leaves around the pizza and then sprinkle the top with 1 teaspoon of salt. Cook.

Sometimes I like to overcook this pizza as it makes it go really crisp then when I cut it it breaks apart and it is like having salty, garlic, rosemary crisps!!

Eat with a Pilsner: Peroni, Pilsner Urquell



Topping Two: Prawn Avocado and Bocconcini Pizza

Enough for one pizza

Pizza sauce

1 bunch Fresh basil

4 – 6 Bocconcini balls sliced

12 raw prawn – shelled and tailed

Avocado sliced

Chili powder or dried chili flakes

Parmesan cheese

2 cloves of garlic crushed and soaked in ¼ cup of olive oil

Brush the pizza pan with the olive oil that the crushed garlic has been soaking in. Roll out your dough and place on pizza pan. Brush the outside of the dough (which becomes the crust) with the same olive oil. Lightly cover the pizza dough with the tomato sauce. Next layer roughly torn basil leaves around the base then place the thinly sliced bocconcini around the base. Place the raw prawns evenly around the base and on top of the cheese followed by slices of avocado in between the prawns. Sprinkle with the chili powder or flakes and then lightly sprinkle freshly grated parmesan cheese around the top. Finally, using a pastry brush or a spoon flick or drizzle some of the garlic oil around the pizza to add that last bit of flavour.

Cook.

Eat with a White Beer – Feral White, Holgate White Ale or of course the mighty Hoegaarden Ale.



Topping Three: Roast Duck Pizza

You can do this with Chinese Roast duck, or left over Barbeque chicken – whatever you have. Enough for one pizza.

½ roast duck – meat stripped off the bone and roughly pulled apart
1 clove garlic - crushed
1 -2 small red chili's – finely chopped
1 cup of finely chopped Bok Choy or spinach
½ cup marinated roast capsicum – bought from deli
¼ cup hoi sin sauce
3 spring onions finely sliced on the diagonal
Mixed pizza cheese – the pre grated mixed cheese in a packet you buy at the grocery store
Pizza sauce
Olive oil

Heat a fry pan on the stove top or barbeque grill and add some olive oil. When it is hot add the garlic and the chili and cook for about a minute then add in the duck (or chopped chicken) and give it a good stir. When the meat is hot add the hoi sin and the Bok Choy and stir well to combine and cook for a minute or two so that the bok choy starts to wilt then remove from the heat. Roll out your pizza dough and lay out on your pre oiled tray, spoon over a thin layer of tomato base and cover with some of the duck mixture. Don't over stack with the meat mix or you will end up with a soggy base. Top with some thin slices of capsicum and a generous sprinkle of the chopped shallots. Sprinkle over as much or as little cheese as you want. Cook.

I love this with a good hoppy pale ale: Arctic Fox. Wicked Elf Pale, Red Hill Hop Harvest Ale, Feral Brewing Hop Hog.



Topping Four: My Italian Pizza

Enough for one pizza

Pizza sauce

6 thin slices of prosciutto

8 slices of hot sopressa

8 good quality anchovy fillets

Marinated roasted capsicum – sliced thinly

4 marinated artichokes

12 kalamata olives – deseeded and quartered

Big hand full of baby Rocket

1 jar Marinated goats cheese – I use Meredith Goats Cheese

Pinch of dried Chili flakes - optional

Mixed pizza cheese

Roll out your dough and place on a pre greased pizza tray and then spread a nice layer of the pizza sauce over the top. Tear the prosciutto in pieces and scatter evenly around the pizza then do the same with the sopressa. Then scatter around the capsicum, olives and the artichokes – just pull the artichokes apart with your fingers to break them up. Now lay as many or as few of the anchovies around the pizza and then again using your fingers crumble a couple of blocks of the goats' cheese around the pizza. Sprinkle some of the chili flakes over the top and then drizzle a little of the garlic infused olive oil around. Place the rocket evenly over the pizza and then take a generous handful or two of the mixed cheese and sprinkle evenly over the top. Cook.

This pizza has lots of different flavours going on, so I like to have a sprightly and refreshing beer with this which of course to my way of thinking means a Saison. Luckily I can get my two favourites here in Vic easily - Temple Saison, Chevalier Saison otherwise go for a La Chouffe or a Saison Dupont.

