FOOD & CULINARY

Paul Hollywood Bread Recipes Focaccia

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Discovering Paul Hollywood’s Approach to Focaccia

There is something deeply satisfying about pulling a golden, dimpled tray of focaccia from the oven. The aroma of olive oil and rosemary fills the kitchen, and the crust crackles as it cools. When it comes to mastering bread, few names carry as much weight as Paul Hollywood. Known for his exacting standards as a judge on *The Great British Bake Off*, Hollywood has spent decades perfecting the craft of baking. His recipes are celebrated for their clarity, reliability, and the beautiful results they deliver. Among his many bread creations, the Paul Hollywood bread recipes focaccia stands out as a particularly rewarding bake. It is a bread that balances rustic simplicity with a soft, airy crumb, and it is accessible to bakers of all skill levels. In this article, we will explore what makes his focaccia so special, break down the recipe in detail, and share tips to help you create focaccia that is every bit as good as what you would find in a traditional Italian bakery.

The Magic of Focaccia: A Bread with Character

Focaccia is often described as a cousin of pizza, and for good reason. Both share a similar dough base, but focaccia is typically thicker, softer, and more focused on the flavour of the bread itself. It is a yeast-risen flatbread that originates from Italy, particularly the regions of Liguria and Genoa. What sets focaccia apart is its texture: a tender, pillowy interior with a slightly crisp, golden exterior. The signature dimples pressed into the dough before baking are not just decorative. They serve a practical purpose, creating little wells that hold olive oil, salt, and any toppings you choose. Paul Hollywood bread recipes focaccia captures this essence beautifully. His method emphasizes hydration, proper kneading, and patience with rising times. The result is a bread that is wonderfully versatile, perfect for sandwiches, dipping, or simply enjoying on its own with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.

Who Is Paul Hollywood and Why Trust His Focaccia Recipe?

Paul Hollywood is a British baker, author, and television personality who has become a household name through his role on *The Great British Bake Off*. He began his career as a baker in his father’s bakery and later worked at prestigious hotels and restaurants. Over the years, he has developed a reputation for rigorous technique balanced with practical, home-friendly advice. His recipes are written with a precision that helps bakers avoid common pitfalls, yet they never feel intimidating. When you turn to Paul Hollywood bread recipes focaccia, you are learning from someone who has tested his methods countless times. His focaccia recipe is a masterclass in handling a high-hydration dough, developing gluten structure, and achieving that hallmark soft texture. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced baker, his guidance is invaluable.

Understanding the Key Ingredients in Paul Hollywood’s Focaccia

Every great focaccia begins with quality ingredients. Paul Hollywood’s recipe uses a handful of simple

components, each chosen for a specific purpose. Let us look at what you will need and why they matter.

Strong Bread Flour

The foundation of the dough is strong bread flour. This type of flour has a higher protein content than all-purpose flour, which means it can develop more gluten. Gluten gives the bread its structure and chew. For focaccia, you want a flour that will support the airy crumb while still offering enough strength to hold the dimples. Paul Hollywood typically recommends a strong white bread flour with a protein content around 12 to 13 percent.

Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Olive oil is not just an ingredient in focaccia; it is a defining feature. It is mixed into the dough and generously drizzled on top before and after baking. The oil enriches the dough, adds moisture, and contributes to the tender crumb. It also helps create a crisp, golden crust. Using a good quality extra virgin olive oil makes a noticeable difference in flavour. Paul Hollywood often emphasizes that you should not skimp on this ingredient.

Water

Water hydrates the flour and activates the yeast. The temperature of the water matters. Focaccia dough is typically made with lukewarm water to help the yeast work efficiently. Paul Hollywood often suggests using water at around body temperature, roughly 37 degrees Celsius, to create the ideal environment for fermentation.

Yeast

Both fresh yeast and instant yeast can be used. Paul Hollywood bread recipes focaccia usually calls for instant or fast-action yeast, which is convenient and reliable. Yeast is what makes the dough rise, and it also contributes to the complex flavour that develops during fermentation. A long, slow rise is often recommended to enhance the taste.

Salt

Salt is essential for flavour and for controlling fermentation. It strengthens the gluten network and prevents the dough from rising too quickly. Maldon sea salt or flaky salt is often used for the topping, adding a delicate crunch and burst of savoury flavour.

Herbs and Toppings

Classic focaccia is often topped with fresh rosemary, but you can also use thyme, oregano, or even sliced olives and cherry tomatoes. Paul Hollywood keeps the topping simple in his basic recipe, allowing the quality of the bread to shine. A sprinkle of sea salt and fresh rosemary is all it takes to elevate the focaccia to something memorable.

Step-by-Step Guide to Paul Hollywood’s Focaccia Recipe

Now let us walk through the process from start to finish. This method follows the principles found in Paul Hollywood bread recipes focaccia, adapted for home bakers. The recipe makes one large focaccia, perfect for sharing.

Ingredients List

- 500 grams strong bread flour
- 10 grams salt
- 10 grams instant yeast
- 325 millilitres lukewarm water
- 75 millilitres extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- Flaky sea salt for topping

- Fresh rosemary sprigs

Step 1: Mix the Dough

In a large mixing bowl, combine the bread flour, salt, and instant yeast. Make sure the salt and yeast are on opposite sides of the bowl initially, as direct contact can kill the yeast. Add the lukewarm water and 50 millilitres of the olive oil. Mix everything together with your hands or a dough scraper until it forms a rough, sticky dough. Do not be tempted to add extra flour at this stage. The dough will be sticky, and that is exactly what you want for a soft focaccia.

Step 2: Knead the Dough

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Knead for about 8 to 10 minutes. You can also use a stand mixer with a dough hook for convenience. The dough should become smooth, elastic, and less sticky as the gluten develops. Paul Hollywood stresses the importance of proper kneading to create a strong gluten network that will trap the gas bubbles during rising. Perform the windowpane test: stretch a small piece of dough thin enough to see light through it without tearing. If it passes, you are ready for the next step.

Step 3: First Rise

Place the kneaded dough in a lightly oiled bowl. Cover with cling film or a damp tea towel. Leave it in a warm, draught-free place for about one to two hours, or until it has doubled in size. The timing depends on the temperature of your kitchen. A slower rise at a cooler temperature will develop more flavour, but for a standard recipe, one hour at room temperature is usually sufficient.

Step 4: Shape and Second Rise

Once the dough has risen, turn it out onto a lightly floured surface. Gently deflate it by pressing down with your fingertips. Transfer the dough to a well-oiled baking tray. A rimmed baking sheet or a rectangular pan works perfectly. Using your fingertips, press the dough out to fill the tray evenly. Cover again and leave to rise for another 30 to 45 minutes. The dough will puff up beautifully.

Step 5: Create the Dimples

This is the most iconic step in making focaccia. With oiled fingers, press deep indentations all over the surface of the dough. Do not be gentle. The dimples should go all the way down to the bottom of the tray. These pockets will catch the olive oil and salt, creating those irresistible flavour pockets. Drizzle the remaining olive oil generously over the top. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt and fresh rosemary leaves.

Step 6: Bake to Perfection

Preheat your oven to 220 degrees Celsius (200 degrees Celsius for fan-assisted ovens) or 425 degrees Fahrenheit. Bake the focaccia for 20 to 25 minutes, or until it is deep golden brown and sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom. If you prefer a darker, crisper crust, you can add a few extra minutes. Remove from the oven and let it cool on a wire rack. Drizzle with a little more olive oil while it is still warm for added richness.

Tips for Achieving Perfect Focaccia Every Time

Even with a reliable recipe, small details can make a big difference. Here are some expert insights inspired by Paul Hollywood bread recipes focaccia that will help you refine your technique.

Use a High Hydration Dough

The ratio of water to flour in focaccia is higher than in many other breads. This extra moisture is what gives the crumb its soft, open texture. Do not be afraid of a sticky dough. It is supposed to be that way. If your dough feels too wet, resist the urge to add flour. Instead, wet your hands slightly when handling it. This prevents sticking without altering the hydration level.

Let the Dough Rest Properly

Patience is a virtue in bread baking. Allowing the dough to rise fully develops the gluten and creates a light, airy structure. If you rush the rising times, your focaccia will be dense. Paul Hollywood often recommends a slow, cold fermentation in the refrigerator overnight if you want to deepen the flavour. This is an excellent option for planning ahead, as it also makes the dough easier to handle.

Do Not Skimp on Olive Oil

Olive oil is more than a topping; it is integral to the character of focaccia. A generous amount in the dough and on top ensures a tender crumb and a crispy, golden crust. Use a good quality olive oil that you enjoy the taste of, as its flavour will come through in the finished bread.

Get Creative with Toppings

While classic rosemary focaccia is timeless, do not hesitate to experiment. Try adding halved cherry tomatoes, sliced black olives, or thinly sliced red onion before baking. You can also sprinkle grated Parmesan or pecorino cheese over the top in the last five minutes of baking for a savoury crust. Paul Hollywood bread recipes focaccia often includes variations that incorporate sun-dried tomatoes or roasted garlic for extra depth.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Even seasoned bakers can encounter challenges with focaccia. Here are some common pitfalls and solutions.

Dough That Is Too Stiff

If you add too much flour during kneading, the dough becomes stiff and dry. The resulting focaccia will be dense rather than light and airy. Trust the recipe and keep your hands and work surface lightly floured. Use a dough scraper to manage stickiness without incorporating excess flour.

Overproofing the Dough

Letting the dough rise for too long can cause it to collapse. The gluten structure weakens, and the bread will not hold its shape. Keep an eye on the dough during the second rise. It should be puffy and nearly doubled in size, but not so inflated that it looks fragile. If you accidentally overproof it, you can punch it down, reshape it, and let it rise again, though the texture may be slightly different.

Uneven Dimpling

The dimples are not just decorative. They allow oil and salt to pool on the surface, creating flavour pockets. If you do not press deeply enough, the oil will sit on top and may not penetrate the dough. Use the tips of your fingers and press firmly all the way down. You cannot hurt the dough. In fact, this gentle deflation helps

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