

# *Focaccia*

## *Whole wheat malt sourdough with olive oil*



*Focaccia* is an Italian bread shaped into a disc or rectangle and approximately 1 inch (2.5 cm) thick after baking. Flavorful toppings of olive oil, basil, oregano, garlic, olives, mozzarella, tomato, and more are optional. Left plain a round focaccia can be cut into six triangular sandwich buns.

Focaccia is usually baked in a hot oven, but I suggest the alternative of steaming at 250°F (121°C) for a soft bun texture.

Whole *Hourani* durum wheat flour<sup>1</sup> is used here for a light-colored bread, but any freshly ground whole wheat flour can be tried. The color and texture will vary accordingly.

This is a good bread dough for beginning sourdough bakers; Kneading is minimal. By using a little more, or less water, this dough can also be used to make pizza, a pan loaf, sandwich buns or a basket loaf. Here are some factors that can ensure consistent success.

First a steadily warm place at 86°F (30°C) is needed for the sourdough starter to mature and for the dough to rise with reasonable speed. The whole process takes twice as long at 68°F (20°C). *When growing up in England we had a cupboard containing the hot water storage tank, and shelves for airing clothes that was also just the right temperature for raising bread dough. And in the Alps of Northern Italy, I visited a museum house with a wood fired oven opening into the kitchen but backing into an adjacent room kept constantly warm from the heat of the oven.* If all else fails, there is available a very neat electrically heated,

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<sup>1</sup> [www.honoremill.org](http://www.honoremill.org)

folding dough proofing box<sup>2</sup>, with a temperature range suited to raising bread, making yogurt and more.

Also important is a sturdy digital scale that can be read easily in grams, preferably to the first decimal place, with a generous capacity for your heaviest mixing bowl plus bread ingredients, and an electric plug option. Such scales usually have an easy taring (zeroing) system. Scientific laboratory suppliers are a good source. There is no doubt that weighing ingredients in grams with a good scale is much faster, much more consistent and easier than measuring in pounds and ounces and cups and spoons!

The sourdough starter needs to be prepared according to the author of any sourdough bread recipe! The sourdough and bread recipes must match, or success may be elusive. There are myriad ways described for sourdough starters. Here, please use my simple whole wheat sourdough<sup>3</sup> recipe in which an established sourdough when replenished is fermented to maturity, meaning it is no longer gassing. After replenishment this takes 24-36 hours at 86°F (30°C). Once matured, the starter is stored in the refrigerator at 40°F (4°C) until needed to add directly to your bread dough. If your supply is low, it is necessary to replenish the sourdough at least 2 days before you intend to make bread.

Malt flour, which I consider to be an essential ingredient, is available<sup>4</sup> or you can make your own<sup>5</sup>. Enzyme active malt is grain that has been sprouted and low temperature dried; it is very rich in enzymes. During bread-making, these enzymes release nutrients from the bran and germ and convert starch into sugars. Wheat, rye, and hull-less barley malts are suitable ingredients for whole grain breads.

A steam oven is not essential for baking bread, but it certainly bakes a larger softer loaf. A regular home kitchen oven can be used, with a tray of water present during the entire bake to provide humidity. Counter-top toaster ovens are also effective for baking bread. However, home kitchen ovens will not mimic a bamboo steamer on the stove top. True steam ovens and combi-ovens, which are a combination of oven types: steaming, convection, broiling, baking, proofing and more, are usual in food service kitchens, but are rare in home-kitchens. Purpose-made steam or combi-ovens can mimic stove top steaming. A counter-top home combi-oven<sup>6</sup> is the oven that I use to steam focaccia. This oven set at 86°F (30°C), can also be used conveniently for the final 2-hour steamy rise (proof) before baking. A Wi-Fi connected combi-oven can be programmed to manage both the final rise and the steam baking of focaccia continuously, without hands-on attention, for a total of 3-4 hours.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.brodandtaylor.com](http://www.brodandtaylor.com)

<sup>3</sup> [Simple whole wheat sourdough starter](#)

<sup>4</sup> [www.capaymills.com](http://www.capaymills.com)

[www.admiralmalt.com](http://www.admiralmalt.com)

[www.morebeer.com](http://www.morebeer.com)

<sup>5</sup> [Making your own enzyme active malt](#)

<sup>6</sup> [www.anovaculinary.com](http://www.anovaculinary.com)

## **Method**

*Elapsed time from mixing to baked focaccia is 7-8 hours*

*Most hands-on time is at the beginning and 4 hours after first rise.*

*Amounts are for 2 x 8 inch (20 cm) diameter focacce*

*Whole wheat flour basis: 500 grams*

### **Step I. Making the dough**

<i>Ingredients</i>	<i>Amount in grams</i>	<i>Bakers percent*</i>
Whole wheat flour	500	100
Wheat malt (enzyme active)	25	5
Fine sea salt	7.5	1.5
Extra virgin olive oil	25	5
Water at 86°F (30°C)	325 - 375	65-75
Simple whole wheat sourdough starter (mature)	50	10

*\*Percent with respect to flour basis*

[] In main mixing bowl, mix whole wheat flour, malt, and salt.

[] Use a fork to finely work olive oil into the flour.

[] In a separate jug or bowl combine water and sourdough starter; add this mixture to main mixing bowl. *Begin with the lower amount of water for the dough.*

[] Mix until all the ingredients are evenly incorporated. Knead the formed dough for a few minutes only. *Use a spurtle or wooden spoon to mix ingredients together. Knead by hand after dough has formed. At this stage dough should be medium soft, it should be homogeneous but may not be completely smooth. Mix in 5-10% more water with respect to the flour if dough is too stiff.*

[] Press the dough down into a bowl or box with lid and leave to ferment and rise at 86°F (30°C) for 4 hours. *Dough should be puffy at the end of this time but may not rise to double the original volume.*

### **Step II. Shaping and Final rise**

*Water moistened hands, a clean board and a dough scraper are all that you will need to handle the dough. Do not sprinkle flour.*

[] Punch dough down on a smooth surface. Divide into two equal weight pieces.

[] Knead each dough piece briefly to finish dough development to a smooth cohesive texture. Form it into a ball and round it. Cover with inverted bowl or moist cloth. Rest the dough for 15-30 minutes at warm ambient temperature.

[] Using a dough scraper, pick up dough ball and center it on an 8x8 inch (20x20 cm) square of baking parchment. Using moistened fingertips, gently press it out to a disc with a thickness of half an inch (2.5 cm) approximately.

[] Transfer each shaped focaccia on paper to baking sheet. Leave to rise for 2 hours at 86°F (30°C) with steam or humidity. *During this final rise time, if steam or humidity is unavailable, cover with parchment paper and a moist cloth. Remove the cloth and paper cover before baking!*

### ***Step III. Steam baking***

[] Bake with 100% steam at 250°F (121°C) for 60 minutes.

*If steam is unavailable, cover focaccia with a square of parchment paper during the bake.*

*When using a small oven for this low temperature baking, the focacce can be placed in a cold oven with the timer set to begin when oven has heated to 250°F (121°C).*

[] After baking allow the focacce to cool to room temperature on a rack, before slicing and serving. Store focaccia, wrapped in fresh paper towels, in a closed container.