

Magic City magazine

Fire up the dough

By Dayle Hayes | Posted: Tuesday, May 11, 2010 8:00 am

As summer arrives, East Rosebud Lake beckons with visions of outdoor grilling. I could, of course, cook pizza on my snazzy propane grill at home. But there is something about long summer evenings, a cabin full of family and friends and our old-school charcoal grill that are just right for a pizza party.

BASIC PIZZA PROCESS:

1. Prepare dough. Roll out smallish (1-2 person) pizzas that are thinner in the center and have a small rim around the edge.
2. Grill crust on one side until golden brown. Time required may be as little as 5 minutes, depending on the temperature of the grill. Burst any dough bubbles that rise on the top of crust.
3. Flip pizza and add sauce and toppings on the cooked side of the crust.
4. Place uncooked side of pizza on grill; cover and cook until ingredients are heated throughout and bottom crust is golden. Cheese should melt but may not bubble as it would in oven.
5. Remove from grill; let cool for a minute or two on a cutting board or counter top. Slice and serve with a tossed baby green salad, your favorite summer wine or ale, and fruit for dessert.

TRIED AND TRUE TIPS:

Get well organized beforehand. Once things get cooking, you need to keep the pizza assembly line moving steadily while the grill is hot.

- Aim for a medium-hot grill, with coals well-spaced underneath the cooking area. Too hot, you'll have a burnt crust, too cold and nothing will melt on the top. You can put the crust directly on the grill or, as I prefer, use a metal pizza pan with holes.
- Go minimalist with toppings. This is not the place for your favorite man-cave, five-meat, four-cheese pizza recipe. If you load up the toppings, the heat will have trouble getting through to melt the flavors together.
- Make it a group effort. Actually, very little effort is required when many hands are involved. Guests and family can help chop and prepare toppings. Then, as the crusts come off their first round on the grill, folks can create their own unique and flavorful combinations.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE:

- Grill
- Metal pizza pan with holes
- Large spatula
- Plenty of cutting boards or counter space (to cool and cut pizzas on)
- Rolling pizza cutter

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS:

Crust:

- Use your favorite pizza dough recipe. Make certain that it can be rolled (or stretched) to be relatively thin so it will cook quickly.

Sauce:

- Go lightly with sauce, if you use any at all. Since the heat is mostly below the pizza, too much sauce can make the crust soggy and keep the other ingredients from heating up nicely.
- Sauce alternative: Brush crust lightly with olive oil, flavored if you like. Instead of plain tomato sauce, consider a thin layer of pesto or spicy BBQ.

Toppings:

- I favor light, local, fresh ingredients in unusual combinations. My favorite is Gruyere, wild mushrooms, and arugula (any tender green could be used.) The mushrooms are drizzled with olive oil and lightly roasted in the oven or on the grill. The arugula is tossed with fresh lemon juice and olive oil; then placed on the fully cooked pizza.

Other delicious options:

- Grilled chicken, salmon, sausages, vegetables (asparagus to zucchini) and/or fruit (think pineapple) cooked just prior to the pizza. For cheese, think beyond the typical pizza blend and try asiago, bleu, chevre, feta, Gouda, pecorino or Swiss.