

Pizza Meets Grill

By Dana Jacobi

American Institute for Cancer Research

Imagine grilling without the guys, charred chunks of meat and eye-stinging smoke. I recently enjoyed such an evening, joining a female team gathered to turn an abundance of vegetables and pizza dough into a memorable, meatless dinner of grilled pizza.

The evening was a women's grilling clinic taught by Robyn Lindars, a bundle of energy whose mission is encouraging women to get out of the kitchen and to feel confident about running the grill themselves. Her cookbook and blog (www.grillgrrrl.com) include much of what we learned and emphasize cooking low and slow, a smart way to enjoy grilled flavor while minimizing the formation of substances on meats that are not good for us.

The grilled pizza we made had alluring contrasts of crisp and chewy crust, succulent veggies and just enough cheese to complement them without delivering an overload of fat or sodium.

Making grilled pizza has four steps. First, be sure the grill grate is clean and oiled so the dough does not stick. Second, divide the dough – store-bought is fine – into portions and set them to rise, following package directions. Third, make the grilled vegetables using grill basket. Finally, pair the crust and topping. After adding the topping, be sure to cover the grill. This closing the cover helps the cheese melt quickly and avoids excess charring. Closing the cover also increases the smoky flavor of the vegetables.

If you are an apartment-dweller, take heart. I am, too. Using a grill pan gives you all but the final extra hint of smoke flavor on the topping. In every other respect, pan grilling on the stove works well.

Grilled Pizza with Grilled Vegetables

1 lb. prepared whole-wheat pizza dough
4 large crimini mushrooms, stemmed, cut crosswise into 1/2-inch slices
2 large plum tomatoes, halved lengthwise, seeded, and cut crosswise into thick slices
1 medium orange, yellow or red bell pepper, seeded, cut into 1/2-inch strips
1 medium zucchini, cut into 1/2-inch slices
½ medium red onion, cut crosswise into thin slices
2 cloves garlic, cut vertically into 4 slices
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil, divided
1½ cups (6 oz.) shredded low-fat mozzarella cheese
4 large basil leaves, cut crosswise into thin strips

Divide pizza dough into thirds. Set aside one third for later use. Divide remaining thirds in half, for a total of four pieces. Gently form into balls and place in lightly oiled bowls. Cover bowls with dishtowel and let sit until dough is soft and pliable, 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on how cold it is.

While dough warms up, for topping, in mixing bowl, combine mushrooms, tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, onion and garlic. Sprinkle on salt and 4-5 grinds pepper. Add 4 teaspoons of oil, and using your hands, toss until vegetables are coated with oil. Set vegetables aside for 30 minutes.

When pizza dough is soft, lift 1 piece and pat it into a disk. Holding disk by its edge so dough dangles down, gradually work your fingers around the edge, turning and gently stretching it into 4-inch disk. Place stretched dough on large baking sheet and repeat with remaining 3 pieces. Cover dough and let rest for 10 minutes, until soft enough to repeat, stretching pieces to 7-8 inches. Neat, evenly thick rounds are nice, but do not worry if dough is irregularly shaped and thin in places. Leave dough on baking sheet, covered, while preparing grill.

Heat gas grill to medium-high or charcoal grill until ash on charcoal is white. Place marinated vegetables in grill basket. Grill, stirring vegetables occasionally, until crisp-tender, 7-8 minutes. Set grilled vegetables aside.

Turn gas grill to low or move coals all to one side of charcoal grill. Use remaining oil to brush disks of pizza dough lightly on both sides. Arrange dough on grill; for charcoal grill place pieces on side without coals. Grill 5-6 minutes, until dough is puffy on top, and bottom is golden brown with darker spots. Thin areas will be darkest. Using tongs, turn pizza crusts over. Immediately sprinkle one-quarter of cheese over each crust, leaving ½ inch edge. Close lid and grill until bottom of crust is golden with darker spots and cheese is just melted, about 1-2 minutes. Remove grilled pizza crusts to individual plates and heap one-fourth of grilled vegetables on top of each crust. Sprinkle on basil and serve immediately.

Makes 4 pizzas.

Per serving: 370 calories, 18.5 g total fat (6 g saturated fat), 38 g carbohydrate, 18 g protein, 7 g dietary fiber, 592 mg sodium.

###

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters research on the relationship of nutrition, physical activity and weight management to cancer risk, interprets the scientific literature and educates the public about the results. It has contributed more than \$91 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. AICR has published two landmark reports that interpret the accumulated research in the field, and is committed to a process of continuous review. AICR also provides a wide range of educational programs to help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. Its award-winning New American Plate program is presented in brochures, seminars and on its website, www.aicr.org. AICR is part of the global network of charities that are dedicated to the prevention of cancer. The WCRF global network is led and unified by WCRF International, a membership association which operates as the umbrella organization for the network. The other charities in the WCRF network are World Cancer Research Fund in the UK (www.wcrf-uk.org); Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands (www.wcrf-nl.org); World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong (www.wcrf-hk.org); and Fonds Mondial de Recherche contre le Cancer in France (www.fmrc.fr).