

No-knead, no FUSS

One simple bread dough recipe and a layer of bricks yields crispy pizzas, crusty breads

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Who wouldn't want to be able to replicate at home the incredible wood-fired pizzas and breads that are available at some local restaurants such as Veneto Gourmet Pizza and Pasta on East Avenue and Wegmans Food Markets' bakeries? Most of us simply don't have the space or resources to install a massive brick oven, indoors or out.

But that doesn't mean we can't make a few inexpensive adjustments to our home oven that will yield results that are pretty darn close, says Gerry Brinkman, a veteran Rochester-area chef and culinary instructor at Monroe Community College.

Before Brinkman built his backyard brick oven, he simply bought some firebricks from Miller Brick Co. on Ridgeway Avenue. He laid them side by side on the bottom rack (not the floor), then would preheat the oven for at least an hour at 500 degrees so the bricks could absorb the heat. He then cooked pizzas right on top of the bricks.

"It gives you a good approximation of stone hearth. You don't get the steam capture, but you do get that 500-degree heat," he says.

While pizza stones sold at cookware stores are better than nothing, they don't give you the thermal mass that you get with bricks, Brinkman says. The bricks are usually cheaper as well. (Miller sells 4½-inch-by-9-inch-by-2½-inch firebricks for \$1.65 each. Measure your oven to determine how many you will need.)

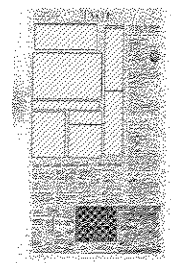
As for bread, Brinkman has become a devotee of the no-knead technique of Manhattan baker Jim Lahey that became all the rage after a 2006 *New York Times* article by Mark Bittman. So enamored by Lahey's truly no-knead method, Brinkman spent a day in February watching him at his Sullivan Street

Bakery in Manhattan.

Lahey's method imitates a masonry oven by baking the bread in a preheated and covered Pyrex, cast iron or enamel-covered cast-iron pot. The pot both holds the heat and creates a steamy environment that helps form that irresistible crisp crust. The dough is wet, uses very little yeast and has a long, slow rise. And it really does not need kneading.

I also have become a Lahey no-knead fanatic and have used the following recipe dozens of times since it was published in November 2006. Sometimes I replace some of the regular flour with up to 1 cup whole wheat flour, buckwheat flour, fine cornmeal or masa harina. I have also folded in herbs, olives, sundried tomatoes or other extras for the second rise. Sometimes I bake it on my preheated pizza stone instead of inside a preheated pot, spritzing the surface with water a minute or two after putting it in the oven to add steam. It is the easiest, most flexible and reliable bread recipe I've come across yet. □

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No-Knead Bread

From *The New York Times*. Adapted from Jim Lahey, Sullivan Street Bakery. For the second rising, Gerry Brinkman suggests putting the dough on oven-safe parchment paper, then covering the dough with a towel. When you are ready to bake, remove the towel, lift the paper and dough together and lower both inside the preheated pot. Cover and bake.

3 cups all-purpose or bread flour, more for dusting
¼ teaspoon yeast (instant or regular both work)
1½ teaspoons salt, or more, to taste
Cornmeal or wheat bran as needed

In a large bowl, combine flour, yeast and salt. Add 1½ cups water, and stir until blended; dough will be shaggy and sticky. Cover bowl with plastic wrap. Let dough rest at least 12 hours, preferably about 18, at warm room temperature, about 70 degrees.

Dough is ready when it's dotted with bubbles. Lightly flour a work surface and place dough on it; sprinkle it with a little more flour and fold it over on itself once or twice. Cover loosely with

plastic wrap and let rest about 15 minutes.

Gently and quickly shape dough into a ball. Coat a cotton towel (not terry cloth) with flour, wheat bran or cornmeal; put dough seam side-down on towel and dust with more flour, bran or cornmeal. Cover with another cotton towel and let rise for about 2 hours. When it is ready, dough will be more than double in size and will not readily spring back when poked with a finger.

At least a half-hour before dough is ready, heat oven to 450 degrees. Put a 6- to 8-quart heavy covered pot (cast iron, enamel, Pyrex or ceramic) in oven as it heats. (Remove any nonmetal or nonglass handles if possible). When dough is ready, remove pot from oven. Slide your hand under towel and turn dough over into pot, seam side-up; it may look like a mess, but that is OK. Shake pan once or twice if dough is unevenly distributed; it will straighten out as it bakes. Cover with lid and bake 30 minutes, then remove lid and bake another 15 to 30 minutes, until loaf is browned. Cool on a rack.

Yield: One 1½-pound loaf.

