

Tempranillo • Pizza Garden

Tempranillo (pronounced tem-pra-NEE-yoh) is the third most widely planted wine grape variety in the world (570,000 acres), and nearly 90% of it is grown in Spain. In the late 1990's, believing that Tempranillo would thrive in Lodi's warm Mediterranean climate, Markus Bokisch began importing Tempranillo cuttings directly from Spain to his vineyards. Today he is the leading grower of Tempranillo grapes in Lodi. Kyle Lerner of Harney Lane Winery also planted some Tempranillo near the tasting room. His first full vintage from those vines, a 2012 Tempranillo, stunned the Pacific Northwest Tempranillo grower community by winning best of class at America's largest wine competition. Not to be outdone, Bokisch 2014 Tempranillo won best of class the following year. During the second weekend in November, about fifteen Lodi wineries put on a two-day "Tour of Tempranillo," with special events, wine and food pairings, and barrel tastings.

Origin: No one is sure exactly where Tempranillo came from. In the early days, people thought it was related to Pinot noir, but DNA studies have shown that there is no relation. There are records of Tempranillo production in Ribera del Duero, Spain, going back 2,000 years. In 1905, Frederic Bioletti brought Tempranillo to California, but it was not well received, because this was during the run-up to Prohibition.

Tasting and Serving: They say that to get elegance and acidity out of Tempranillo, you need a cool climate, but to get high sugar levels and the thick skins that give deep color, you need heat. Lodi has a little of both. Our Tempranillos tend to have higher sugar and thicker, darker skins than their Spanish relatives. A Lodi Tempranillo has a deep ruby to garnet color. The aromas start with cherry, plum, and chocolate with hints of vanilla and Tempranillo's signature aroma: leather. In your mouth, the medium body and noticeable tannin structure leaves an aftertaste of soft tannins for a full 20 seconds. Serve Tempranillo at 60 to 65 degrees (10 to 15 minutes in a refrigerator).

Pairing: Tempranillo pairs well with many types of food because of its savory notes. It's usually paired with Spanish dishes like roasted vegetables and cured meats. Other great pairings are Italian dishes with tomato sauces, grilled smoky meats, corn dishes like polenta, and mildly spiced Mexican food. I chose Bokisch Vineyards 2014 Tempranillo to pair with my Pizza Garden meal. My rich tomato sauce and hearty pork sausage toppings are a perfect complement to the wine's rich cherry, plum, chocolate, tobacco, and leather aromas. The wine's complex tannin structure and medium acidity are just enough to cut through the residual fat in the cooked sausage while not overwhelming the meat's garlic, sage, and pepper flavors. This pairing was easy. If you really want to explore the nuances of Spanish wine and food, Lodi style, Liz Bokisch has her own lifestyle blog web site packed full of recipes, travel tips, and other ideas for enjoying Lodi wine country. She draws upon her Spanish roots and formidable culinary knowledge to produce one great dish after another for wine club events and other activities that promote Bokisch wines.

Pizza Garden

Why make your own pizza when you can just pick up the phone and have a couple of perfectly baked pies delivered to your door for under ten bucks a person? Because anyone can do that. Only the most admired home chefs are willing to make their own dough and sauce, chop and cook their own toppings, and attempt the risky task of trying to bake a perfect pizza pie in their own oven. The other reason is that you can use any topping you want. You can design gourmet pizzas with your own signature topping blend that no commercial pizza parlor can make. Personally, I make my own pizza, because I can't find a pizza parlor that will give me the pizza I want. I want a large olive, bratwurst, and sausage from Pizza Garden. Unfortunately, Pizza Garden closed in the 1980's.

There's nothing that older Lodians miss more than the Pizza Garden. On Friday nights, cars lined up on Lodi Avenue waiting to turn into the packed Pizza Garden parking lot. It was the place to be and be seen. Oh, did I mention they had incredible pizza? Thin crispy crust, a tasty cheese blend, and unique toppings piled inches high that made cold pizza the best Saturday morning breakfast anywhere in Lodi. Dean had to close the Pizza Garden due to it being built over an old swimming pool and because he was ready to retire anyway. It's now the west parking lot of the S-Mart store behind Taco Bell. My friend who worked at Pizza Garden in its heyday has the original recipe, but I cannot drag it out of him, so I created this simple pizza to honor the legendary Lodi hangout.



Ingredients

1 1/2 cups water
1 tsp sugar
1 package (1/4 ounce) active dry yeast
4 cups bread flour (plus extra for handling dough)
2 tsp salt
2 TBS Lodi olive oil
15-ounce can tomato sauce
6-ounce can tomato paste
1 TBS fresh oregano (or 1 tsp dried oregano)
1 TBS fresh basil (or 1 tsp dried basil)
1 clove garlic, chopped fine brunoise
1 TBS Nellie and Joe's Key West lime juice
2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
2 cups shredded provolone cheese
1 TBS canola oil

Toppings for the Meat Pizza

1/2 pound fresh bratwurst
1/2 pound fresh mild Italian sausage
1/2 cup large pitted black olives, sliced

Toppings for the Veggie Pizza

1 vine ripened tomato, sliced thin
1/2 red onion, sliced thin
5 white mushrooms, sliced thin
1 green bell pepper, cored and sliced into thin strips
1/2 cup pitted Kalamata olives, sliced
4 cloves garlic, cut fine brunoise

Making the Crust

Dissolve the sugar in the water and heat it to between 100 and 110 degrees (you can microwave the water for about 30-40 seconds to get it to temperature). Check the temperature with an instant read thermometer. Pour the yeast over the surface of the water and let it set for five minutes. The yeast should form a foam on the surface and you can smell it. In a mixing bowl, add flour, salt, and 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Mix with a hand-held or stand mixer on a low setting. When the yeast water is ready, pour it in and mix until the dough forms a ball with a slightly moist outer skin. Place the dough ball on a large cutting board or pastry sheet (at least 12 inches by 12 inches) that is dusted with flour and roll it around. If the dough is too soft and sticks to the surface, add a little more flour until it holds its shape and no longer sticks. Coat a 3-quart bowl with 1 tablespoon of olive oil and place the dough ball in the bowl. Rotate the dough ball to cover it completely with oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let it rest for about an hour. The dough will approximately double in size. Remove the dough and place it on a cutting board or pastry sheet that is dusted with flour. Using your hand or a knife, "chop" the ball in half. Each half will become a single pizza crust. If you don't know how to toss a pizza (I don't), use a rolling pin to flatten one ball out to about a 12-inch circle. Place the dough on a sheet of non-stick, oven-safe parchment paper. Do the same for the remaining dough ball.

Making the Sauce

While the dough is resting, pour the tomato sauce, tomato paste, oregano, garlic, and lime juice into a small sauce pot. Heat to medium heat until you see the first bubble, then reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes. When simmering, there should be a little steam rising from the surface, but it should not be ejecting drops of red sauce on your stovetop like a volcano.

Making the Toppings

The classic Pizza Garden toppings were sliced black olives, ground Italian sausage, and ground bratwurst. If you don't live near Lodi or don't want to make the long trip to get the ground bratwurst and sausage at Lakewood Meats, your fresh bratwurst will probably come in a sausage skin. You can cut the skin and squeeze the ground meat out. If that doesn't work, cut the sausage into 1/4-inch slices, then cut each slice into quarters (see photos below) then give the whole thing a few chops with the knife after cooking until it becomes a small dice. Fresh sausage is squishy, so you may not get exact quarters, but that's OK. You just need to open up the sausage so that every piece has ground meat exposed. Heat a 4-quart sauté pan to medium heat. When hot, coat the bottom of the pan with canola oil and sauté the bratwurst until it is fully browned (not burned, but just not red). Spoon the meat out of the pan and discard the excess fat and oil. Do the same for some fresh Italian sausage. A half pound of each meat will be enough for one pizza. For the second pie, I recommend a light veggie combination (fresh tomato, red onion, bell pepper, white mushroom, olives, and fresh garlic) to complement the hearty meat pizza.



Topping the Pizza

Using a small ladle, spread a thin layer of sauce on the first crust. All parts of the dough should be covered with sauce, but you may see the dough through the sauce in some areas. Spread one cup of mozzarella and one cup of provolone cheese over the sauce. The pile should be thick enough that you only see specks of sauce through the cheese. Spread the bratwurst, sausage, and olives evenly on the pie. Spread the remaining sauce and cheese on the second crust the same way as the first. Lay out the tomato, onion, bell pepper, and mushroom slices evenly over the cheese. Spread the Kalamata olives and garlic over the other toppings.



Cooking the Pizza

An hour before you plan to cook the first pizza, place a ceramic pizza stone in the center rack of the oven and preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Slide a pizza peel (page 165) under the parchment paper of the first topped pizza. Carry it over to the oven and slide the pizza with parchment paper off the pizza peel onto the hot stone. After about 5 to 8 minutes, when the crust has slightly hardened, slide the pizza peel between the pizza and the parchment paper and pull the paper out. Cook for 15 minutes total or until the cheese is completely melted and begins to bubble and the toppings and crust start to slightly brown. Use the pizza peel to lift the pizza out and place the pizza on a cutting board. If you are cooking more than one pizza on the same stone, close the oven and wait 15 minutes before sliding the second pizza onto the stone. The stone needs some time to heat back up to the oven temperature.

Presentation

Cut each pizza into eight equal pieces. Most chefs at home pizza parties serve the pizzas as they come out of the oven. If you want to serve two pizzas at the same time, and only have one stone, cover the first pizza with foil to keep it warm. If you have a second oven, set it to warm or 100 degrees, and hold the pizza (before slicing) until the second one is ready. Two 12-inch pizzas serve 4 to 6 people.

The California Ingredient

When 14-year-old Lodi High School student Bruce Albers was trying to achieve a school-work-life balance, he walked past Lakewood Meats on his way to school one day and Joe Roster asked him if he wanted a job. Forty-five years later, Bruce is either behind the counter serving customers or in the back room cutting meat and making sausage. One of his jobs as a young aspiring butcher was delivering pounds of Lakewood Meats' ground Dakota bratwurst to the Pizza Garden. This house-made Dakota bratwurst comes in bulk (ground), fresh links, or smoked links. Lodi and the neighboring community of Lockeford are one of the few places west of the Dakota Territory that you will find this German delicacy.

Tips and Tricks

If you don't feel comfortable making your own crust, there are several read-to-bake crusts on the market. They won't be as good as fresh dough, but they'll do.

You can buy Mozzarella already shredded. An 8-ounce pack will give you two cups. You may have to shred your own provolone. A half-pound block will give you two cups of shredded cheese.

I use parchment paper, because it makes it easier to handle the uncooked pizzas. Reynolds Kitchens Genuine Parchment Paper is non-stick and oven safe up to 420 degrees. If you want to get professional, you can buy a couple of large wooden pizza peels to assemble and serve your pizzas on.

The key to cooking the perfect homemade pizza is to get the stone the same temperature as the air inside the oven. The stone cooks the crust and the air cooks the cheese and toppings. If the stone is too cool, the crust will turn out soft and will fall apart. That's why you wait 15 to 20 minutes between batches to allow the entire stone to get back to the oven air temperature.

Depending on the size of your oven and how many racks it has, you may be able to bake two pizzas at the same time, either side by side or one on each rack. You can also put the pizza stone(s) on a gas grill, if you want to cook outside.

Home pizza ovens are becoming common, so if you are lucky enough to have one, be sure to get an infrared surface thermometer. You point it at the stone cooking surface inside your oven to verify that the surface is at the same temperature as the air in the oven as indicated on the thermometer. This tells you when to put the pizza in. Infrared thermometers cost about \$20 to \$60.

Two homemade crusts, three cups of homemade sauce, and four cups of cheese cost about \$12. The toppings for this recipe cost another \$15. When you consider that two restaurant quality medium multi-topping pizzas delivered to your door will cost about \$50 with tip, good pizza tools will pay for themselves in two or three pizza nights. A good ceramic pizza stone costs about \$15 to \$20. If you plan to do a lot of pizza parties with 4 or more people, it's definitely worth investing in a second ceramic pizza stone. You can also buy a 20-inch by 13-inch rectangular pizza stone (about \$35) that will hold two 10-inch pizzas in a standard 30-inch wide oven. You also want a pizza cutter with a rolling blade (see below) to avoid any knife accidents.

Johnsonville Original Brats are a good substitute for Lodi or Lockeford fresh Dakota bratwurst, if you can't get the real thing. Johnsonville also makes a mild Italian sausage. These sausages come in one-pound packages of five, so two and half brats and two and a half Italian sausages will make one pizza.

One trick of pizza makers is to spread corn meal under the raw dough after it's rolled out. This helps the cooked pizza separate from the parchment paper or stone and gives the crust a little more crunch.

Cool Gadgets: Pizza Stone and Peel

Cooking perfect pizza at home requires a few special tools. You must have a ceramic pizza stone that fits on your oven rack or your barbecue grill. A typical round pizza stone is 13 to 16 inches in diameter. You also need a metal pizza peel to keep the pizza from falling apart when you move it. A pizza peel is the large flat spatula that pizza makers use to slide pies in and out of the oven. The home version is just a large flat metal blade with a wood handle. A pizza cutter with a rolling blade is inexpensive and is much safer than trying to make long cuts through cheese and crust with a chef's knife and cutting yourself. The big box kitchen stores sell these three items together in a kit for about \$30 to \$40. Also shown in the photo below is a triangular pizza server.

