

Rosemary socca (or chickpea flour) bread

This tasty chickpea-base flat bread is part of the staple fast food diet of the residents of both Nice on the French Riviera and its neighbour Genoa on the Italian Riviera. There is even an historical rivalry between these two cities regarding ownership of the recipe for this irresistible pizza-like bread. Socca is quick and simple to make and it is an ideal substitute for cereal and grain based breads. Socca is traditionally made in a wood-burning oven using a copper pan, but it is just as good when made in a very hot oven at home.

- 1 cup chickpea flour (available in health food, Indian and Middle Eastern shops)
- 1 Cup room temperature water
- 1/4 cup virgin olive oil, divided into two portions
- fresh rosemary leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder (optional, as this is not a traditional ingredient, but it does lighten the bread slightly if added)
- 1 teaspoon vegetable salt
- 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper

Chickpea batter: Sift the chickpea flour into a large mixing bowl and add salt, pepper and baking powder (if using). Gradually pour in the water, whisking constantly to eliminate lumps. Then slowly stir in half the olive oil and mix thoroughly for a minute or two until a runny dough has formed. Add the rosemary and any other additional ingredients, then cover and set aside while the oven warms, or better still overnight.

To cook: Preheat oven to very hot (220C-240C or 430F-470F), then heat a dry, round 50cm (20 inch) pizza dish, or equivalent, for about 5 minutes. Remove and spread the remaining oil evenly over the hot dish. Then pour in the batter, spread out thinly, and immediately bake for 8-10 minutes until bread is firm and starting to brown. Remove the socca bread from the oven, lightly brush the top with olive oil and place under a hot griller for about a minute until the top turns a golden color and there are a few slightly burnt tips. Slice into pizza like wedges and serve hot. This delicious bread is meant to be peppery-hot, with a distinct rosemary flavour.

Variations: Socca is delicious if finely chopped onion, sun dried tomatoes, capsicum or chopped black olives are added to the batter, or substitute the rosemary with fresh oregano or basil. Just always make sure that it has lots of black pepper missed in with it. It makes a great base to top with a light, spicy salad, or to tear off in small pieces and use to scoop into and appropriate dip. It can even be used as a pizza base, so all you then have to do is add toppings such as tomato paste, olives, fetta or ricotta cheese, thinly sliced vegetables, seafood and herbs.

Preparation time: 8 minute

Cooking time: 12 minute

Yield: 3-4 serve

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