

The Tasty History of Pizza

Pizza evolved over thousands of years. Its ancient roots go back to the flatbreads of Babylon and Egypt. When flatbreads arrived in ancient Greece they became *Plankinton*, dough seasoned with olive oil and spices. The proto-type of pizza was born!

In pre-Renaissance Naples workers bought pasta from street vendors but it was messy and difficult to eat on the run. Since Naples was once a Greek colony, the people were very familiar with *plankuntos*. Street vendors began to add tomato sauce to the traditional flatbread and selling it in place of pasta. By 1830, the first pizzeria opened in Naples.

Modern pizza was created in 1889. To honor a royal visit to Naples, local *pizzaioli* (pizza maker) Raffaele Esposito baked three pizzas for King Umberto and Queen Margherita. One was topped with pork fat, cheese and basil. The second was topped with olive oil, garlic and tomatoes. The third pizza was a patriotic creation with the colors of the Italian flag – red tomatoes, white mozzarella cheese and green basil. This combination was the queen's favorite and in a stroke of marketing genius, Esposito named it the Margherita pizza in her majesty's honor. It was an instant success in Naples.



Queen Margherita of Italy

Pizza's popularity remained fairly local in southern Italy and Sicily. Many Italians outside of this region considered pizza food for the poor. But pizza was on the move. In the late 1800s, Italian immigrants brought pizza to America. Many such immigrants began selling pizza on the streets of New York. One such *pizzaioli* was Gennaro Lombardi who sold his first slice in 1887. By 1905, Lombardi opened the first pizzeria in the United States, Lombardi's Pizzeria Napoletana in New York's Little Italy neighborhood.

Soon other pizzerias opened in other immigrant neighborhoods from New York to New Haven and Boston. The Bay Area's first pizzeria, Tommaso's,

opened in San Francisco's North Beach in 1935. In those days a small pizza cost 75¢.

Still pizza remained unknown to most Americans. It wasn't until the end of World War II that pizza went mainstream in America. The credit goes to soldiers return from the war. U.S. troops who served in Italy returned home with a taste for pizza and the rest, as they say, is history.

Pizza Fun Facts

- The average American eats 23 pounds of pizza a year.
- Total U.S. pizza consumption is equal to 400 slices per second.
- The most popular pizza topping is pepperoni – a sausage created by Italian-Americans here in the U.S.
- February 9th is International Pizza Day.
- Chicago Deep Dish Pizza was created by Ike Sewell in 1943.
- The first pizza mix went on sale in 1948.
- Frozen pizza debuted in 1957.

Ranger Ira's Pizza Dough

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups warm water (110 degrees F)
- 1 teaspoons salt
- 4 1/2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 teaspoons active dry yeast

Dissolve yeast in water. Let sit for 10 min. In the meantime, mix dry ingredients. Add and mix in oil and yeast mixture. Turn out onto floured surface and knead until smooth and elastic. Let rise for 1 1/2 hours. Punch down. Stretch into pizza shape, add toppings and bake in hot oven until crispy on the bottom. Enjoy!



Ardenwood Historic Farm
www.ebparks.org
(510) 544-3290
awvisit@ebparks.org