

GRILLED RATATOUILLE PIZZA



Grilled pizza topped with grilled summer veggies - zucchini, eggplant, tomatoes, onions, peppers and herbs - and herbed goat cheese that's been slathered onto crisp pizza crust. See the Notes section at the bottom for more ideas, including options to spice up the olive oil for this dish.

Makes 1 large pizza, serving 4 as a main course

INGREDIENTS

4 ounces goat cheese at room temperature

1 clove garlic

1 teaspoon minced fresh parsley, plus a couple more sprigs

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme, plus a few more sprigs

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil, divided (plus more if needed)

Coarse salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 medium zucchini

1 medium eggplant

1 medium yellow onion

1 yellow, red or orange bell pepper (or combination of smaller sweet peppers)

1 medium tomato, sliced thin (about 1/8 inch thick is ideal)

Flour for stretching the dough

Cornmeal (optional) for ease of sliding the pizza onto the grill

1 store-bought or homemade pizza dough

Oil for the grill grate if needed

A handful of fresh basil leaves

Optional: additional spices to stir into the olive oil (see Notes section below)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put the goat cheese in a medium bowl. Use a microplane to grate the garlic clove into the cheese. Add the minced parsley and thyme and 2 Tablespoons of the olive oil. Use a fork or a small silicone spatula to mix everything together. Keep the bowl at room temperature until you are ready to assemble the pizza.

2. Heat a gas grill to high heat with the lid closed. If your grill has an additional top rack, remove it to make flipping the pizza crust easier. (Unless you are highly experienced with grilling pizzas over charcoal, I don't recommend testing your luck with this recipe on a charcoal grill. It can get pretty tricky to control the heat well enough to cook pizza over charcoal.)

3. Slice the onion into rounds 1/2" thick and brush them with olive oil. Slice the eggplant and zucchini into rounds 1/4" thick, brush them with olive oil and sprinkle them generously with salt and pepper. When the grill is hot, bring the prepared vegetable rounds, along with the bell pepper, to the grill. Have a platter nearby to transfer the vegetables to as they finish cooking.

4. Lay the onion, eggplant and zucchini rounds on the hot grill, oil side down. Brush the tops of the vegetables with olive oil and sprinkle the eggplant and zucchini generously with salt and pepper. Use tongs to turn the vegetables over as needed until they are evenly charred on both sides and cooked through, then remove them to the platter. Zucchini and eggplant are done when crisp-tender and appetizingly charred, about 10-15 minutes. Onions are done when they are browned and very soft, usually about 15-20 minutes.

If you are adding any of the optional spices to the olive oil for the final drizzle, add them now (see Notes, below).

5. Lay the pepper on the grill alongside the other vegetables. Turn it occasionally until the skin is evenly blistered and blackened, about 5-10 minutes total. Put the pepper in a paper bag to "sweat" for about 10 minutes (this helps loosen the skin so it's easier to remove.) Use your fingers to rub the skin off the pepper, then slice it into 1/4-inch

rounds. Remove the seeds and add the peppers to the platter with the other vegetables. Add the tomato slices to the same platter.

6. Flour your hands and a work surface and stretch the dough into a rough 16" circle (or whatever other shape you happen to achieve; pizza dough has a mind of its own, and rustic, oddly-shaped pizzas can be very appealing, so just go with it). The real key is to avoid holes or extreme thin spots in the dough. For best results, aim for about 1/4-inch uniform thickness across the main body of the pizza (edges can be thicker).

7. When fully stretched, lay the pizza on a pizza peel or large cutting board that has been dusted with cornmeal (or flour), so that the dough will easily slide off onto the grill later.

8. Assemble all the toppings near the grill so you'll be ready to work quickly:

goat cheese mixture with a spoon for spreading

platter of vegetables: grilled eggplant, zucchini, onions and peppers, and tomato slices.

Brush and oil the grill grate if needed.

9. Just before grilling, gently shake the pizza peel or cutting board back and forth to confirm the dough can move freely and hasn't stuck to it. If it has, carefully dislodge it and use more cornmeal or flour underneath if needed to keep it unstuck.

10. Open the grill lid and carefully lay the pizza dough on the grate, starting at the back of the grill and sliding it off as you pull the pizza peel toward the front. Close the lid and let the pizza dough rise and cook for about 1-2 minutes, give or take, depending on the heat of your grill. If you have hotter and cooler spots on your grill (as I do), you may want to shift the position of the pizza dough partway through to cook it evenly all over. Use tongs as needed to partially lift the dough so you can see what's going on underneath.

11. When the dough is crisp and lightly browned evenly on the underside, it's time to flip it over. Slide your pizza peel or cutting board underneath it, and flip it over onto the other side like a giant pancake.

12. Turn the heat to low and work quickly to add the toppings as follows:

Use the back of a spoon to smear the goat cheese mixture evenly all over the pizza, leaving a border of about 1.5 inches all around.

Distribute the eggplant, zucchini, tomatoes, onions and peppers over the goat cheese.

13. Close the lid and cook the pizza for a couple of minutes, letting the toppings bubble and get a little melty. Check the underside of the pizza and shift its position on the grill if needed for even cooking.

14. Use your pizza peel or cutting board to remove the pizza from the grill. Drizzle more olive oil over the top of the finished pizza, then scatter the remaining parsley, thyme and basil sprigs and leaves over the top. Slice and serve hot.

NOTES

Whenever I think about cooking with seasonal ingredients in the summer, I can't help but think of ratatouille, the **classic French combination of tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini and sweet peppers**. It's such a great way to use all that in-season produce, all at the same time. (Serious kudos to whichever French grandmother originally created this dish in Provence.)

But the thing about the original, classic ratatouille, is that that poor French grandmother had to stand over a hot stove for hours on end, cooking each ingredient to its own separate point of perfection, before combining them in a stew (stew! in summer!) to reduce and concentrate and infuse and become amazingly flavorful over the course of a few hours (hours! in summer!).

I intend no disrespect. I'm sure that when and if an appropriately unseasonably-cool day comes along, and happens to coincide with a lull in all the other demands of summer sunshine, at some point I'll write up a classic ratatouille recipe to publish on this very website. Someday.

But in the meantime, we're going to need some other ideas for combining all those summery flavors into a single dish that is a bit more realistic for non-French-peasants to actually make on a modern hot summer day.

So that is how I ended up with the idea of ratatouille pizza, cooked on the grill. It **preserves the traditional notion of cooking each ingredient separately**, to its own perfect state of done-ness, and then combining them in a dish that is more than the sum of its parts. But it all happens on the grill, so you don't heat up your house. And on a pizza, so we can eat with our hands in the backyard.

All the elements are there: the tomatoes, zucchini, sweet peppers and eggplant are scattered over the top of the pizza; the olive oil is drizzled over the top; the garlic and herbs are in the goat cheese and more fresh herbs are sprinkled over the finished product. And although you wouldn't normally find goat cheese in a pot of ratatouille, it's a very Provençal ingredient, so it's a great schmear to help the other ingredients stick to the top of the pizza.

You **could add another dimension** to the dish by stirring a couple generous pinches of [Aleppo pepper](#), [paprika](#), or crushed [fennel](#) or [nigella](#) seeds into the olive oil at the end of Step 4. My [Sumac and Sage](#) seasoning blend would also be very nice here. These aren't part of the traditional ratatouille ingredients, but they would all be super tasty, so go on with your bad self if you feel so inclined! (More details below.)

You can make the herbed goat cheese and grill the vegetables **up to 3 days ahead**. (Store covered in the refrigerator.) If you'd like to **make several pizzas for a crowd**, I'd suggest you stretch all the dough ahead of time, then store the outstretched circles of dough separated by sheets of wax paper on a baking sheet in the fridge until you're ready. It's fairly quick and easy to assemble and grill the pizza, so you could grill up several pizzas consecutively until everyone is served.