



Baker Leslie Mackie rolls the dough by hand to give the bread its homey shape and great texture. If you're in a hurry, roll it out with a pasta machine.

One of the most popular breads at my bakery is a cracker-thin flatbread that's fragrant with rosemary, painted with fruity olive oil, and sprinkled with coarse salt. I've seen customers so impatient for it that they start eating the bread before I've even had a chance to hand them their change.

With no yeast or other leavening, this is a good bread for impatient bakers as well. A few ingredients are combined and briefly kneaded. The dough needs to rest for an hour before it's rolled out, but there's no waiting for it to rise. The rolled dough then bakes for just a few minutes. Because they're so thin, the flatbreads cool quickly and are ready to eat minutes after they've come out of the oven.

THE SECRET INGREDIENT: SEMOLINA Semolina flour, milled from the heart of hard durum wheat, gives the flatbread its sweet, almost cornlike flavor, rich golden color, and pleasingly coarse texture. But semolina's high gluten content means that the dough must be handled gently. This is not a bread dough to slap against the work table. Overmix it or knead it too rigorously and your flatbread will be tough rather than crisp.

Making Rustic

Infused with fresh rosemary and rolled parchment thin, these crisp, fragrant breads satisfy impatient appetites

BY LESLIE MACKIE

Specialty grains like semolina are much easier to buy now than they were only a few years ago. You can find semolina in supermarkets, in Italian and Middle Eastern groceries, and in health-food stores. You can also order semolina by phone by calling the Butte Creek Mill in Oregon (541/826-3531) or Dean & DeLuca in New York City (800/221-7714).

A FAMILIAR WAY TO MIX INGREDIENTS

If you've ever made fresh pasta, you'll be acquainted with the process for making this dough. Begin by combining the dry ingredients in a large mixing bowl and making a well. Into this well, pour the water and olive oil, and then pull the dry

Semolina flour gives the bread its sweet flavor, golden color, and coarse texture.

ingredients into the wet ones with a fork until they're all well combined.

Because the dough requires only a few minutes of kneading, I knead right in the mixing bowl, which keeps me from dirtying another work surface. As soon as the dough is smooth—after no more than three minutes of kneading—I cover it with plastic wrap and chill it for at least an hour to allow the gluten time to relax.



Fragrant rosemary, fruity olive oil, and coarse salt give these flatbreads an irresistible flavor. An irregular shape contributes to a homemade look.

ROLLING BY HAND GIVES THE BREAD A BETTER TEXTURE

At the bakery, I don't have the time to roll each bread by hand, so I rely on a pasta machine, running pieces of the dough through the machine until they reach the proper thinness. But I prefer the uneven texture of hand-rolled flatbreads, which usually come out wider and with a more interesting texture.

For the crispest flatbreads, roll the dough as thin as you can without overworking it, which would develop the gluten and make the bread tough. The trick is to work quickly, rolling each piece of dough out from the center and rotating it slightly after each stroke of your rolling pin. If the dough starts to stick, turn it over, but use as little flour on your work surface as you can get away with. Working additional flour into the dough will also toughen the bread.

Photos: top left, Jan Newberry; above and right, Todd Bryant.

Rosemary Flatbread

Aim to make each bread consistently thin. Don't roll the edges too thin and leave the centers too thick or the breads will bake unevenly. The breads can be any size you like, just be sure they'll fit on your baking stone. The ones shown here are about eight inches in diameter.

FLATBREADS BAKE FAST

Once rolled, the dough goes straight into the hot oven. An unglazed baking stone is essential for making crisp flatbreads. The stone dispenses heat evenly and absorbs moisture from the dough, ensuring that the breads bake quickly and crisp uniformly. You can buy unglazed clay stones at most cookware stores or you can order one from *King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue* (800/827-6836).

Transferring the dough to the baking stone takes a bit of practice. Use both hands or a wide spatula (see Notes, p. 16) to lay the dough onto the stone. If the dough folds onto itself, let it bake for a few minutes and then try unfolding it. After you bake the first two or three, you'll get a feel for handling the dough.

As the breads bake, they'll bubble and turn a rich golden brown.

Within 8 to 10 minutes, the flatbreads are done. Cool them on a rack, brush them with olive oil, and sprinkle them with coarse salt. They'll keep for a day or two, though the olive oil tends to become less attractive after the first day. If you want to bake flatbreads one day to serve the next, oil and salt them the day you plan to eat them.

Flatbreads are rustic breads. They aren't meant to be perfectly shaped. Each one looks different, and that's part of their charm.

Rosemary Flatbread

As you roll out these breads, use as little flour on the work surface as you can get away with to keep the dough from sticking: too much will make the breads tough. Flour amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups). Use either measurement. *Yields about twenty 8-inch-diameter flatbreads.*

18 oz. (3 cups) semolina flour
13½ oz. (3 cups) unbleached white flour
2 tsp. kosher salt; more for the finished breads
3 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary
1½ cups water
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for the finished breads

Combine the flours, salt, and rosemary. Make a well in the center and pour in the water and olive oil. With a fork, pull the dry ingredients into the wet ones until a mass forms. Knead the dough just until smooth, 2 to 3 min.; be careful not to overwork it. Cover with plastic wrap and chill at least 1 hour.

Put a baking stone in the oven and heat the oven to 450°F. Work with one 2½-oz. piece of dough (about the size of a large egg) at a time; keep the rest of the dough covered. On a very lightly floured surface, flatten a piece of dough with the palm of your hands and roll it out as thin as possible. Transfer the rolled dough directly to the stone in the hot oven and bake until crisp and light golden brown, 8 to 10 min. Let cool slightly. Brush with olive oil and sprinkle with salt.

Leslie Mackie bakes rosemary flatbread and many other styles of bread at her Macrina Bakery in Seattle. ♦

