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Deep Dish Pizza - Sausage & Red Onion with a Crispy, Caramelized, Cheesy Crust

Makes two 12-inch deep dish pizzas - Serves 8

Who doesn't love pizza??? Tonight it's deep dish pizza on the menu! This deep dish version of pizza is inspired by a few unique pizza places that feature a partial cheese crust. Inside, delicious layers of flavor are assembled into some sort of pizza heaven. Fresh dough is topped with a layer of cheese, red onions, a robust red sauce, and finally, a hearty serving of spicy sausage - one slice is nearly enough!

Dough Ingredients:

3/4 cup warm water
2-1/4 teaspoons (or one packet) yeast
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons butter, melted
2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour

Pizza Toppings:

1 lb low-moisture mozzarella cheese,
sliced in 1/8"-thick slices
8 ounces parmesan cheese, shredded
1 pound sausage, roughly rolled into 1" bite-sized discs
1/2 red onion, thinly sliced

Sauce Ingredients:

2 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoon olive oil
1 (28 oz) can petite diced tomatoes
1 (14oz) can crushed tomatoes
1 (6 oz) can tomato paste
2 teaspoons dried basil
2 teaspoons dried oregano
1 teaspoon dried marjoram
1/4 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
1 teaspoon Kosher salt
1 tablespoon sugar

Directions:

1. Prepare the pizza dough by hand or by using a stand mixer. Pour the warm water into a large bowl, and add the yeast. Stir slowly for about two minutes, then add the sugar, salt, olive oil, and melted butter and stir again until combined. Add 1 cup of flour, and stir until combined. Slowly add the remaining 1-1/2 cup of flour until a dough ball has formed. Knead the dough several times until a smooth ball has developed. Cover the dough with a damp cloth and let the dough rise in a warm location for about 1-1/2 hours.
2. Meanwhile, prepare the sauce. Sauté the garlic with the olive oil, stirring until fragrant. Be sure to watch this step carefully so that the garlic doesn't burn! Once the garlic is fragrant, add the diced tomatoes, crushed tomatoes, tomato paste, basil, oregano, marjoram, pepper, salt, and sugar. Bring the sauce to a low simmer and cook stirring as needed for 40-45 minutes or until the sauce has thickened nicely.
3. Use two well-seasoned 12" cast iron pans or deep dish pizza pans. Cover the surface with a generous layer of canola oil on the bottom and sides. Press the dough into the cast iron as a single flat layer and let the dough rise for an additional 30 minutes in the pan. (You can freeze half the ingredients for later.)
4. Preheat the oven to 500 degrees F.
5. Once the dough has risen in the pan, it's time to assemble the pizza. Make a layer of folded mozzarella slices all along the edge of the pan creating a "cheese crust" and then continue to layer on top of the layer of dough. Add the shredded parmesan on top of the mozzarella.
6. Spread the sliced red onions around the pizza on top of the cheese layers.
7. Add a hefty layer of pizza sauce to the pizza covering the onions completely.
8. Finally, top with pizza with the sausage discs.
9. Line a large baking sheet with aluminum foil to place on the oven rack directly below the pizza to catch any drips as the pizza cooks. Turn on a ventilation fan, and perhaps even crack a window. Any cheese that spills over will make a bit of a smoke.
10. Tent a loose piece of aluminum foil over the pizza. Bake for 20 minutes.
11. Check to make sure that the drip pan is correctly aligned to catch any spillage and continue baking for an additional 20-25 minutes or until the pizza crust is well set, the sausage is cooked, and the sauce and cheese below are bubbling hot. The sides of the crust that are made of cheese might look blackened, but they should not taste burnt, instead they will taste of delightful caramelized cheese and help to hold all of the ingredients in place.
12. Let the pizza cool slightly, enough to slide it from the pan onto a parchment paper-lined cutting board. Cut the pizza into slices with a sharp cook's knife working from the cheesy edge into the middle.
13. Pace yourself when enjoying - one pizza is hearty! One 12-inch pizza serves 4 hungry adults.