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things to cook in a pizza oven

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Things to Cook in a Pizza Oven: A Guide to Unlocking the Full Potential of Your Brick Oven

When most people think of a pizza oven, they picture a blazing hearth, a steaming pizza crust, and the unmistakable aroma of melted cheese. In reality, a pizza oven is a versatile kitchen powerhouse that can transform simple ingredients into gourmet masterpieces. Whether you're a seasoned chef or a weekend cook, understanding the full range of **things to cook in a pizza oven**can elevate your culinary game and impress guests at any gathering.

Why a Pizza Oven Is More Than Just Pizza

A pizza oven's high temperatures (often reaching 700–900°F or 370–480°C) create a unique cooking environment that mimics the conditions of a professional commercial oven. This intense heat caramelizes sugars, sears proteins, and creates a crisp exterior while keeping the interior tender. The result is a depth of flavor and texture that is difficult to achieve on a conventional stove or even a standard oven. As a result, the list of dishes that can thrive in a pizza oven is surprisingly diverse.

Temperature Matters

Understanding the temperature range of your oven is key. Most wood-fired pizza ovens reach peak temperatures around 800°F (427°C). At these temperatures, pizza dough cooks in just a minute or two, producing a blistered, chewy crust. However, lower temperatures (around 500–600°F or 260–315°C) are ideal for breads, pastries, and certain savory dishes that require a longer cook time to develop flavor without burning.

Heat Distribution and Convection

The design of a pizza oven—its dome shape and thick brick walls—ensures even heat distribution. This creates a convection effect that circulates hot air, cooking food uniformly. Whether you're roasting vegetables or baking bread, this consistent heat is a major advantage.

Classic Pizza Recipes

Let's start with the obvious: pizza. A pizza oven is the ultimate tool for creating the perfect pie, but there's more to explore than the standard cheese and pepperoni.

Neapolitan-Style Pizza

- Crust: Use high-protein flour, a simple 1:1:0.5 ratio of flour to water to yeast, and a long fermentation period.
- Topping: San Marzano tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, basil, a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil, and a pinch of sea salt.
- Cooking: Bake at 900°F (480°C) for 90–120 seconds.

New York Style Pizza

- Crust: A slightly thicker dough with a higher hydration level.
- Topping: Tomato sauce, mozzarella, and optional toppings like pepperoni or sausage.
- Cooking: Bake at 700°F (370°C) for 3–5 minutes.

Thin Crust Pizza

- Crust: Very low hydration dough rolled thin.
- Topping: Light sauce, minimal cheese, and fresh herbs.
- Cooking: Bake at 800°F (427°C) for 60–90 seconds.

Beyond Pizza: Bread and Artisan Breads

One of the most popular **things to cook in a pizza oven**is bread. The high heat creates a beautiful crust, while the interior remains airy and fluffy.

Ciabatta

- Dough: A wet, sticky dough with high hydration (about 80% water).
- Fermentation: 12–24 hours at room temperature.
- Cooking: 400–450°F (204–232°C) for 12–15 minutes.

Focaccia

- Dough: Similar to ciabatta but with added olive oil for tenderness.
- Toppings: Rosemary, sea salt, and a drizzle of olive oil.
- Cooking: 400–450°F (204–232°C) for 12–15 minutes.

Bagels

- Dough: Dense, high-protein dough.
- Boiling: Brief boil before baking.
- Cooking: 500–550°F (260–288°C) for 5–7 minutes.

Pizza Dough for Calzones

- Preparation: Roll dough into circles, fill with cheese and meats, seal edges.
- Cooking: 700–800°F (370–427°C) for 3–4 minutes.

Savory Dishes That Thrive in a Pizza Oven

The intense heat of a pizza oven can caramelize vegetables, sear meats, and create complex flavors in a short time. Here are some savory options to explore.

Roasted Vegetables

- Ingredients: Carrots, zucchini, bell peppers, onions, and mushrooms.
- Seasoning: Olive oil, garlic, thyme, salt, and pepper.
- Cooking: 400–450°F (204–232°C) for 15–20 minutes.

Grilled Chicken Thighs

- Marinade: Lemon juice, olive oil, rosemary, and garlic.
- Cooking: 600–650°F (315–342°C) for 8–10 minutes.

Smoked Sausages

- Preparation: Wrap sausages in foil.
- Cooking: 500–550°F (260–288°C) for 12–15 minutes.

Seafood Skewers

- Ingredients: Shrimp, scallops, and chunks of firm fish.
- Seasoning: Olive oil, lemon zest, and parsley.

- Cooking: 650–700°F (342–370°C) for 3–5 minutes.

Stovetop-Style Meatballs

- Ingredients: Ground beef or pork, breadcrumbs, egg, herbs.
- Cooking: 500–550°F (260–288°C) for 12–15 minutes.

Sweet Treats to Bake in a Pizza Oven

Don’t let the pizza oven’s reputation for savory limit your dessert options. The high heat can caramelize sugars, creating delightful sweet treats.

Chocolate Chip Cookies

- Preparation: Traditional cookie dough.
- Cooking: 350–375°F (177–191°C) for 10–12 minutes.

Apple Galette

- Crust: Shortcrust pastry.
- Filling: Sliced apples, cinnamon, sugar.
- Cooking: 400–450°F (204–232°C) for 20–25 minutes.

Cheesecake Bites

- Preparation: Cream cheese base.
- Cooking: 350–375°F (177–191°C) for 12–15 minutes.

Brownies

- Preparation: Classic brownie batter.
- Cooking: 350–375°F (177–191°C) for 20–25 minutes.

Fruit Tarts

- Crust: Tart shell.
- Filling: Fresh berries and custard.
- Cooking: 375–400°F (191–204°C) for 15–20 minutes.

Beverage Pairings and Grilling Drinks

While the pizza oven is primarily a cooking appliance, you can also use it to warm drinks or create unique beverage experiences.

Warm Mulled Wine

- Ingredients: Red wine, cinnamon sticks, cloves, orange zest.
- Method: Warm gently on a low heat setting or place a small pot inside the oven’s lower rack.

Hot Chocolate

- Ingredients: Milk, cocoa powder, sugar, vanilla.
- Method: Warm in a pot over low heat or use a small oven-safe saucepan.

Grilled Beer

- Method: Place a beer bottle on the oven’s lower rack at 350°F (177°C) for 5–7 minutes to create a caramelized crust on the bottle’s exterior.

Tea Infusions

- Method: Warm water in a pot inside the oven at 200°F (93°C) for a gentle infusion.

Tips for Cooking in a Pizza Oven

- Preheat Thoroughly: Allow the oven to reach the desired temperature before placing any food. This ensures even cooking and prevents undercooked edges.
- Use the Right Baking Stone: A preheated stone absorbs heat and transfers it evenly to the food, mimicking a professional pizza oven's surface.
- Adjust Cooking Times: High temperatures mean shorter cooking times. Keep a close eye on food to avoid burning.
- Ventilation Matters: If using a wood-fired oven, maintain proper airflow to control temperature and avoid excessive smoke.
- Experiment with Wood Types: Different woods (oak, maple, fruitwoods) impart distinct flavors. Try them on bread or roasted vegetables for varied results.
- Use a Pizza Peel: A wooden or metal peel helps slide pizza dough in and out of the oven with minimal sticking.
- Keep It Clean: Regularly sweep the interior to remove ash and prevent flare-ups.
- Safety First: Wear heat-resistant gloves and use long-handled tools to avoid burns.
- Measure Ingredients: Precise measurements are crucial, especially for doughs that rely on hydration levels.

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