

Tarka Flatbreads

Last summer a few friends hosted a gathering where they served Momofuku's Bo Ssam with all of the appropriate accompaniments (rice, bibb lettuce cups, and spicy sauces) along with flatbreads, which they passed around swaddled in a tea towel. The towel wasn't just for rustic-cool presentation, it served a purpose: to steam the just-cooked flatbreads, which they made from store-bought pizza dough, in order to make them pliable. It's hard to outshine bo ssam, but these flatbreads came close — the guests couldn't get enough of them, and so our hosts kept churning them out.

I only recently tried the method myself, which couldn't be simpler or more fun. The flatbreads are delicious prepared simply with olive oil and sea salt, but can be made more interesting with a simple "sizzle," which a few of my blog readers brought to my attention to last week after I posted a recipe for dal. A sizzle is also known as chaunk or tarka, oil or butter heated with spices such as cumin, mustard seeds, fennel, dried or fresh chilies, fenugreek, chopped onion, garlic, etc. Traditionally it's spooned over dal, but I've discovered it's delicious brushed over steamy hot flatbreads.

for the dough:

Note: As mentioned above, you can use store-bought pizza dough as my friends do. In which case, skip to step 4.

2 cups (9 oz | 255 g) all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon instant yeast
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water, room temperature or tap
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup boiling water

for assembly:

2 heaping tablespoons flour, plus more as needed
2 sheets parchment paper
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil
pinch sea salt

for the tarka:

Pinch each: cumin seeds, fennel seeds, mustard seeds, coriander seeds or any combination of these — mustard seeds alone would be fine as would cumin seeds. Use what you have.
1 clove garlic, minced
crushed red pepper flakes, optional if you want some heat
pinch sea salt

1. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, and instant yeast. In a liquid measuring cup, combine the waters. Add to flour bowl. Using a rubber spatula, mix until the flour is absorbed and the ingredients form a sticky dough ball.
2. Cover bowl with a damp tea towel or plastic wrap and set aside in a warm spot to rise for 1½ hours or until the dough has nearly doubled in bulk. *To create a warm spot, turn your oven on for 1 minute; then turn it off — it should be only slightly warm, about 100°F.*
3. Preheat the oven to 550°F (being sure to remove rising bread first). Place Baking Steel in the oven and let heat at 550°F for at least 45 minutes. Using two forks, deflate the dough by releasing it from the sides of the bowl and pulling it towards the center. Rotate the bowl quarter turns as you deflate, turning the mass into a rough ball as you bring it towards the center.
4. Sprinkle a work surface with one heaping tablespoon of flour. Sprinkle the dough with another tablespoon of flour. Using floured hands, turn the dough out onto the floured surface and shape into a ball. Use a bench scraper or knife to divide into 6 equal portions. With floured hands, roll each portion into a ball, using the pinky-edges of your hand to pinch the dough underneath each ball. Let the balls sit on the tucked-in edge for at least 20 minutes without touching.
5. After the 20 minutes, place a sheet of parchment paper on a work surface. Place oil in a small bowl. Dip your hands in the bowl and coat well with oil. Pick up one round of dough and stretch it out — if you grab the dough from the edges and let it hang, gravity will help stretch it out. Transfer to piece of parchment paper. Stretch out further if necessary — small tears are fine. Repeat with remaining dough balls, using more oil as needed, placing three rounds on each sheet of parchment paper. Sprinkle with sea salt. Use scissors to cut around the rounds of dough to make it easier to transfer to the Steel.
6. Let the dough sit briefly while you make the tarka: place the remaining oil you used for shaping in a small skillet. Add whatever spices you are using along with the garlic into the pan. Turn to high. As soon as you see the garlic sizzling, turn the heat to low. Cook 1 minute; then remove pan from heat. Place a brush nearby.
7. Shimmy stretched pieces of dough, parchment paper and all, onto heated surface — I can get three rounds onto the Steel at one time. Bake for 2 to 3 minutes or until lightly golden. Remove from oven, and transfer to large cutting board or work surface. Brush with the tarka, season with a pinch more salt, then stack the flatbreads on a tea towel and wrap loosely to allow the flatbreads to steam. Repeat with remaining three rounds, stacking the flatbreads on top of the others. Let sit for five minutes before serving.