

**April vacation is upon us.** As a kid, I never quite got the point of a week off in early spring. Yes, in New England mid to late April still qualifies as early spring. In northern New England, it often qualifies as late winter. Anyway, it always rained. Not just for a day or two, it seemed like it rained every day for the entire week.

**Although, I didn't complain about the extra hour or so of sleep in the morning,** the week was filled with a fair amount of grumbling. The weekend-to-weekend, nine day stretch could best be described as boring. It's a pretty sure bet that I complained about being cooped up inside. I would have much preferred two weeks in February for skiing. Alternatively, it would have been nice to leave our stuffy classrooms a week early in June.



**Of course, lots of kids embraced April vacation.** They're the ones who hopped on a plane and spent the week in the pool at their grandparents' condo in Boca or West Palm Beach. My grandparents were smart enough to live in a one-bedroom apartment and so avoided the onslaught of three boisterous children.

**Mom countered any attempt at a pity party with a reminder** of our wonderful February ski vacation in New Hampshire. No, we were not exactly deprived. And yes, at least deep down inside, we knew how lucky we were. Still and all, it was hard to feel your good fortune when each day dawned rainy and you'd already seen "It's a Mad, Mad World" and "Sword in the Stone" ... twice. By Wednesday, Mom was probably more than ready to throw the three of us into a packing crate and ship us to her mother in Florida but she refrained.

**If you're stuck at home with kids or grandkids** on a rainy day or, heaven forbid, week, here are a few ideas to keep them happy and you sane:

**Bake cookies.** Sure, it's the go-to standby for rainy day entertainment but baking never gets old. Everyone but everyone loves cookies, especially if they are loaded up with chocolate chips.

**Host a tea party.** You don't want to eat all those delicious cookies by yourself – do you? Share them with family, friends and neighbors.

**Organize a film festival.** Forget going out in the cold and wet; cuddle up on the sofa with your favorite on-demand provider or a stack of DVDs. Don't forget the popcorn.

**Get moving.** After all those cookies and popcorn, you'll want to get some exercise. Turn on your favorite tunes and dance or crank up the karaoke machine to sing and dance. Next, play charades, Mother May I or Pictionary, extra points for exaggerated gestures and enthusiasm!

**Tackle that craft project.** Turn a color copy of a favorite photo into a jigsaw puzzle, make a video or build fairy houses. When in doubt, Google rainy day crafts with kids!

**Make your own pizza.** Get everyone involved. Cut the dough for individual sized pizzas, offer a variety of toppings and let everyone assemble their own delicious pie.

Stay dry, have fun and bon appétit!

## Homemade Personal Pizzas

*More than dinner, homemade pizza is a great project to share with kids. Enjoy!*

Serves 4-6

16-20 ounces pizza dough (your favorite recipe, store-bought or from your favorite pizzeria)

Marinara Sauce (recipe follows)

Your favorite cheese(s)

Mozzarella

Fontina

Parmigiano-Reggiano and/or Pecorino

Romano

Feta

Goat cheese

Gorgonzola

Your favorite toppings

Caramelized onions or onions and peppers

Sautéed mushrooms, zucchini and/or eggplant

Sliced artichokes, sundried tomatoes, jalapenos, olives or capers

Pesto (spoon over a freshly baked pizza)

Fresh spinach tossed with a dash of olive oil and hint of balsamic vinegar

Crumbled sausage, pepperoni and/or chopped and cooked bacon

Sliced or cubed cooked chicken

Shrimp (to avoid over cooking, add after 3-4 minutes)

Thinly sliced prosciutto (drape over a freshly baked pizza)



Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. If you're using one, place your pizza stone in the oven before turning on the heat. A pizza stone will cook your pizza evenly and give you a nice crispy crust.

Cut the pizza dough into 4-6 pieces. Let everyone stretch a piece of dough, give it a spin or roll out into rounds. Place the rounds on parchment paper.

Invite everyone to spread a little sauce to their pizza and then sprinkle with their favorite cheese(s) and toppings. Transfer the pizzas, parchment and all, to the baking stone or to baking sheets and slide the pizzas into the oven.

Bake until the crust is golden and the cheese is bubbly, about 10 minutes with a baking sheet and about 8 minutes with a pizza stone. The crust's thickness and the toppings determine how long it takes.



## Marinara Sauce

Makes about 4 cups of sauce – you'll need 3-4 tablespoons for each individual-sized pizza

### Olive Oil

1/2 large onion, chopped  
1 small carrot, finely shredded  
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
Pinch red pepper flakes or to taste  
1 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning  
1/2 cup dry red wine  
3 cups (28-ounce can) crushed tomatoes

Heat a little olive oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and carrot, season with salt and pepper and cook until the onion is translucent, 5-7 minutes. Add the herbs, garlic and pepper flakes and cook for 2-3 minutes more. Add the wine and reduce by half. Add the tomatoes and bring to a simmer, stirring often. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes.

*Optional – cool the sauce for about 20 minutes and put it in the blender and process until smooth.*

