



Socca Is an Addiction

Once you decide on the pan and flour you'll use, there's a good chance you'll make it all the time



Mark Bittman

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I first went to Nice in 1992. It was a charmed trip to eastern Provence, filled with Matisse and lavender and sunlight and ... socca. Someone — I wish I could remember who — said, “You can’t go to Nice without getting socca — central outdoor market, every morning.”

So I walk over there on my first morning. There looks to be what might be a socca stand — or certainly, it’s a stand with little besides scissors and some waxed paper and a couple of salt and pepper shakers — but there’s no socca.

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A bike appears. The rider is carrying a socca. The woman at the stand grabs it, cuts it up with the scissors, sprinkles pepper all over it, starts putting messy sections – these are not nice neat triangles, like pizza, but bits and pieces, some big, some small – in sections of paper. She hands them out and takes a euro, or whatever it was then. The bike is long gone, to return in ten minutes with another. Turns out, the oven isn't in the market, but in a side street nearby: a tiny hole in the wall where they pump out the socca and don't even sell it — they just give it to the bike guy.

Socca is a big pancake, made with chickpea (and sometimes fava) flour, water, olive oil, onion, and usually a load of black pepper and some rosemary. You just make a thin batter, season it, put some oil into a socca pan – the best are of lined copper – and then pour in the right amount of batter, mixed with the other ingredients. You bake it until the edges are crisp and the center quite dry. It's the best.



A chickpea socca

They make it right across the border in Liguria, too, where it's called farinata or, in dialect, faina. My friend Luciano took me to his uncle's house about ten years later, and that guy had an outdoor kitchen, but not a fancy one – an old one. He, too, made one faina after another,

and people stood around eating them like they'd never get another. His was incredible – more onion than the one at the stand in Nice and so much black pepper you would gasp and your mouth tingle.

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They're so easy to make at home. It used to be that you had to go to (mostly) Indian markets to get chickpea flour (besan), but now **Bob's Red Mill** sells it, and fava bean flour, and a mixture of the two, and so do many other people. (I do like the combo, and this is all very similar to falafel, a close but obviously fried cousin.)

Years ago, Kerri and I started making mock socca with different flours – because, after all, it's just a big thin pancake. Wheat is good: buckwheat, too. There are undoubtedly traditions in using these, not for socca/farinata, but for similar roasted pancakes elsewhere.

Last night, I did it with purple barley, which was local (and given to me by Glynwood's resident grain genius, **June Russell**) – and it was sensational. (**Hayden Flour** grinds it, as do others. I ground my own, I'm proud/embarrassed to report, with my little **MockMill**.) I will confess I used a little sourdough and let the thing rest for a few hours first, but that was because I have the sourdough. But let me walk you through it both ways:

- Traditional: Mix one cup chickpea flour (or fava bean flour, or a combination, or almost any whole-grain or whole-bean flour) with warm water to a thin pancake flour consistency; it should be pourable. Add a big pinch of salt and about a teaspoon of black pepper. You can let it sit for a while (and this was always part of our recipe, though really, I'm not sure it matters) or just proceed. Heat the oven to 500°F; while it's heating, put a 12- or 14-inch round pan in there (the bigger one is better) – it can be a devoted socca pan, or a cast-iron skillet, or something like this awesome **comal** from

Masienda. When it's hot, add about ¼ cup of oil; put some chopped onion in the batter (let's say 1 medium), and some rosemary if you have it, and pour that into the pan – be careful, obviously – trying not to let the pan cool much. It'll sizzle. Bake, turning the pan occasionally, about 10 minutes or a little longer, until the socca browns on the edges and is dry elsewhere. (Better to let it burn a little on the edges than to have the center too moist, in my opinion.) Eat immediately.




- Adapted: Mix about 50g each of starter and water with 100g of flour (I used barley, as I said, but again any whole-grain flour or bean flour will work), and water and stir; add water if necessary to make a thick, stirrable batter. Let sit for an hour, or six – I don't think this matters much. Heat the oven and proceed as above, thinning the batter at the last minute with more water to make it pourable. Bake as above also. [Editor's note: You can find another of Mark's socca recipes [here](#).]

I write this at 7:30 a.m. I assure you I will be making another tonight. Once you start, you cannot stop.






Socca made with purple barley. Photo: Mark Bittman

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2 Comments

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 **Patricia Delbecchi** 17 hr ago
It's so good. We bought the copper pan in Liguria last fall, and now make it weekly, using chickpea flour. Everyone loves it. We eat it all year long, but in Liguria, they only eat it in the fall.
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Heather L 21 hr ago

This sounds amazing. Our oven tends to smoke above 425 degrees. Will this be terrible if we need to bake it longer/slower at the lower temperature?

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