

THE GROUNDS FOUGASSE

BY GROUP EXECUTIVE CHEF, PAUL MCGRATH

A classic in French cuisine, this bread makes an ideal addition to any menu. Seasoned and garnished to your taste, and served best with olive oil or as an accompaniment to a dip, this simple recipe is sure to be a crowd-pleaser.



INGREDIENTS

500g strong flour, or bread flour as it is generally known, extra for rolling
350g water (lukewarm)
10g fresh yeast or 5g dry instant yeast
10g salt
Olive oil for brushing

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to highest temperature (250°C) with a baking stone or thick baking tray placed inside.
2. Add all ingredients into a food mixer with a dough hook attached. Be careful not to have the yeast touching the salt prior to mixing as it will burn the yeast and affect the fermentation process.
3. Start mixing on slow speed until the ingredients combine and start to form a dough. This will take a couple of minutes.
4. Place the dough in a slightly oiled bowl large enough for the dough to grow in size but not overflow, and cover with a damp tea towel. Rest for an hour at room temperature.
5. When the dough has risen to twice its original size, gently turn the dough out onto a well floured surface, being careful not to deflate the dough too much.
6. Generously flour the top of the dough and slightly stretch it over a square of the work surface.
7. Rest for 5 minutes.
8. Using a dough scraper, cut the dough into 2 halves, then cut each half into 3 roughly triangular shapes.
9. For each triangle, make 1 large cut in the center of the dough, going through to the work surface, careful not to cut the dough in half.
10. Then make 3 small diagonal cuts on each side of the central cut. Using your fingers, gently enlarge the holes in the dough to resemble a leaf shape and shake off excess flour.
11. Lift gently onto a slightly floured (or semolina) surface and garnish to your liking, using a variation of olive oil, salt flakes, rosemary, thyme, herbs, olives, sesame etc.
12. Rest for about 30 minutes.
13. Slide onto the baking stone or tray. With a spray bottle, spray enough water into the oven to create steam (5-10 sprays), and bake for 10-12 minutes until golden brown.
14. Once cooked, remove from oven and brush with olive oil while it is still hot to give a shiny finish.
15. Serve warm.

If working with machine

- Turn to medium speed and mix until the dough is smooth and comes away from the bowl, almost shiny. This may take another 5-10 minutes depending on the power of the machine.

If working by hand

- Flour the surface and hands and turn the dough out onto the bench.
- Continue by stretching out the dough and folding it onto itself.
- Keep working until the dough comes away clean from the work surface. Form the dough into a ball.



Something for everyone

With fresh, seasonal plates, a luscious courtyard and a pet pig called Kevin Bacon, The Grounds of Alexandria might just be your next family food stop.

Madelin Tomelty

Driving down Huntley Street in Sydney's Alexandria, don't be surprised if you see a long line of people loitering on the footpath. Chances are you've just caught a glimpse of The Grounds of Alexandria, the cafe restaurant that has become something of an institution to Sydneysiders since it first opened its doors in 2012.

With Irish-born Executive Chef Paul McGrath steering the ship of this unwaveringly popular foodie destination, there's a daily line of people out the door of 'The Grounds', as it's known to locals, waiting to feast on the honest and wholesome, seasonal dishes the establishment is known for. That, and for Kevin Bacon – the cafe's resident pig – and his farm friends (a sheep, a goat and a brood of roaming chickens) that make up his neighbours in The Garden courtyard. This, along with a beautiful greenery, an enchanting glasshouse, and beds of fresh herbs and bougainvilleas, is enough to entice kids away from their tablets while Mum and Dad enjoy a laidback, delicious meal in an alfresco setting.

The Grounds consists of another five dining areas as well, including the indoor cafe and The Potting Shed, a favourite among The Grounds' younger, socialising clientele. Then there's The BBQ, with its aroma of hot coals reminiscent of Aussie summer gatherings, The Soda Barn that serves sodas and cocktails on tap like the milk bars of yesteryear and, lastly, Pizza Silo with its two woodfired ovens and a menu inspired by founder Ramzey Choker's father's creations.

The Grounds is a unique place to dine with a palpable, buzzing energy that is nothing if not inviting, and yet it's a far cry from Chef McGrath's 20-year career working for some of the best fine dining restaurants of Ireland, the United Kingdom and France. But times are changing, McGrath says. "People are looking for more casual and relaxed environments to enjoy their meals in," he says, but that's not to say a meal at The Grounds is without its fair share of flair. In fact, McGrath's mission is to rival even the upmost fine dining restaurants for quality and consistency, simply enjoyed in a more informal setting.

"The care in the beauty of the presentation is incredibly important to us. We love garnishing our dishes with herbs fresh from the garden and florals from our onsite florist, The Grounds Florals by Silva," he says.

Since moving to Australia in the late 1990s, McGrath has been a key figure on the restaurant scene, working in executive roles across a range of Sydney restaurants including his own, and high-end catering businesses such as Matt Moran's MorSol group.

It was while working part-time as a kitchen assistant in a renowned restaurant in Ireland that a future as a chef became a real possibility. There, McGrath worked alongside one of the country's biggest celebrity chefs, and it was she who encouraged McGrath, and enlightened him on the joys of cooking with organic and sustainably-sourced produce long before it was considered trendy.

The Grounds was one of the first restaurants in Sydney to trailblaze the 'paddock to plate' culinary movement, and together, Choker and McGrath have succeeded in fulfilling their mission to provide wholesome, quality and accessible food to Sydney's residents. But The Grounds of Alexandria is so much more than that. It is not only the gateway to a delicious meal, it's also a fun, fashionable and beautiful place to be. "Ramzey's direction was very clear from the beginning on being wholesome and honest in our offering, creating beauty and having integrity across all areas. It's considered, from the environment and the meal on the plate right down to the welcoming greeting from the staff. He really created a whole new experience." ■