

Spelt Crust Pizza with Fennel, Prosciutto, and Apples

Recipe & Review of *Ancient Grains for Modern Meals* by Maria Speck

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[<http://www.thekitchn.com/thekitchn/book-reviews/spelt-crust-pizza-with-fennel-prosciutto-and-apples-recipe-review-of-ancient-grains-for-modern-meals-by-maria-speck-150129>] Maria Speck opens her book *Ancient Grains for Modern Meals* by declaring that, "Whole grains have cast a spell on me." She then proceeds to cast that spell on us in this sensuous love letter to the delicious possibilities of whole grains. Her heritage is at the heart of her approach; half German, half Greek, and with a journalist's life of experience that has taken her over the world and back, Maria brings a curiosity and a puckish sense of exuberance to this glamorous exploration of whole grains.

Maria and I have the same literary agent, so we were delighted to meet up in person at a recent culinary conference. She is intensely warm and lively in person, practically crackling with life. At the moment I met her, she was literally staggering from joy; her book had just been named in the New York Times' roundup of [good summer cookbooks](#)

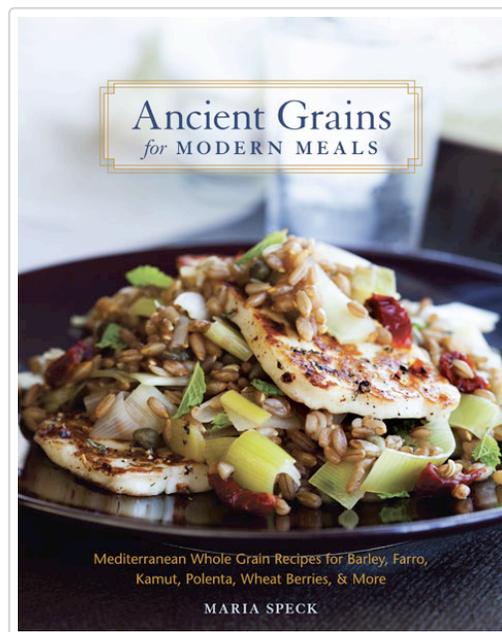
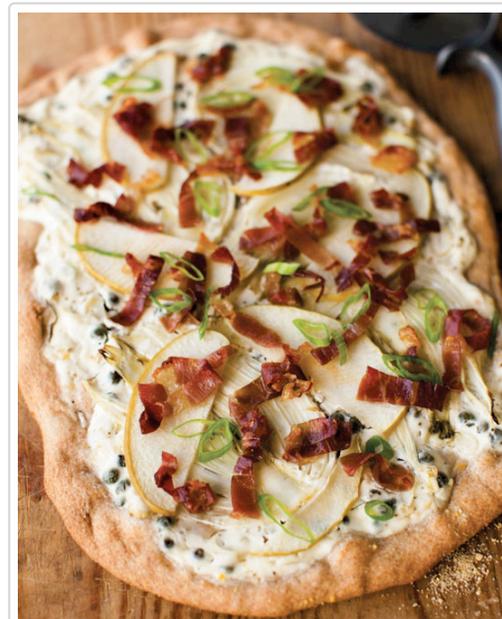
[<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/books/review/25-more-cookbooks.html>]. We took ourselves off to lunch with a few more cookbook author buddies, where Maria promptly ordered a bottle of sparkling wine to celebrate.

The reason I share that story is because Maria is one of those people who, although petite and unassuming, seems also larger than life, always expressing from a huge reservoir of emotion. I feel that people like this write some of the best cookbooks. When that gusto for life is paired with a fine sense of food and how it is prepared, then the emotion, wit, and taste all come together for a book that is not only worth cooking out of, but worth reading as well.

And this cookbook is certainly worth reading. As I describe why, let me be very clear about one thing: *Ancient Grains for Modern Meals* is not a diet cookbook. It is not focused on whole grains as a health product. Maria takes her beloved whole grains — barley to kamut to spelt — and parades them by, all dressed up to bring out their best features and qualities. From a wild rice frittata with mushrooms and crisped prosciutto, to warm oat berries with walnuts and gorgonzola, and buckwheat-feta burgers with tangy parsley sauce, these are recipes to satisfy and delight.

She doesn't skimp on butter and cream; many of the recipes include meat. (Although I would also add that this is an intensely wonderful book for vegetarians.) Her desserts are especially lovely, with a ricotta millet pudding, wheat berry foos, and amaranth-walnut cookies.

I made one of the recipes from the dessert chapter: Purple Rice Pudding with Rose Water Dates. It's a dramatic black pudding that makes a pure purple sauce about it itself as it cooks. Rose water is a tricky thing to cook with; use too much



and you end up with something smells and tastes like a cheap perfume. But here it was perfectly balanced, bringing out the musky sweetness of the dates, which sweeten the pudding far more than the scant sugar. It was a gorgeous and unusual dessert, and I certainly plan to make it again.

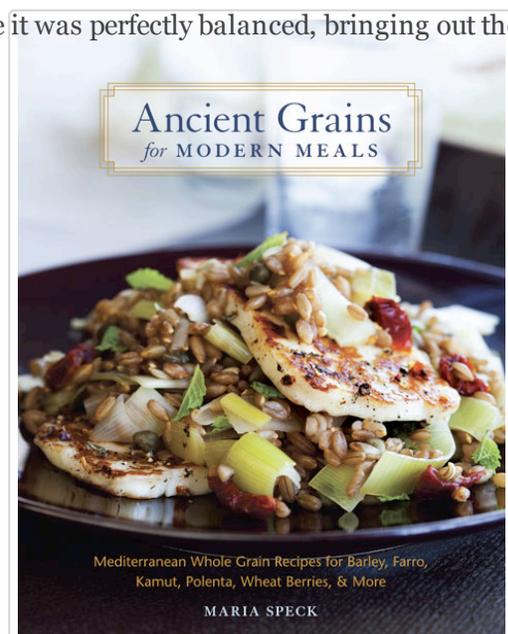
Here I give you another recipe from *Ancient Grains for Modern Meals*: A quick, yeast-less pizza dough made with spelt. It's a dressed-up pizza crust, but also one that takes much less time than a traditional flour dough. And the fennel, prosciutto, and apple topping? Well that's just pitch-perfect taste, a combination of flavors that is just right for summer.

• **Find it:** [Ancient Grains for Modern Meals](#)

[<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1580083544/?tag=apartmentth0a-20>], \$18.80 at Amazon. Published by Ten Speed Press, 2011.

• **More about Maria:** [Maria Speck on Twitter](#) [<https://twitter.com/#!/MariaSpeck>] and [Ancient Grains for Modern Meals on Facebook](#)

[<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ancient-Grains-for-Modern-Meals/103107013106217>]



Spelt Crust Pizza with Fennel, Prosciutto, and Apples

Makes 2 pizzas, to serve 4 to 6 as a main course, or 8 as a starter

spelt crust

2 cups whole grain spelt flour (8 ounces)
2 teaspoons baking powder
3/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1 cup whole-milk ricotta cheese
1/4 cup whole milk
2 tablespoons linseed oil or extra-virgin olive oil
1 large egg
Coarse cornmeal, if using a pizza peel

toppings

4 or 5 green onions
1 cup sour cream
1/4 cup drained nonpareil capers
3/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 Granny Smith apple, halved, cored, and sliced very thinly
1 fennel bulb, halved lengthwise, cored, and sliced very thinly
4 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, cut crosswise into 1/2-inch-wide strips
Linseed or extra-virgin olive oil, for brushing

1. First, make the dough. *To prepare the dough by hand:* Whisk together the spelt flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar in a large bowl. Make a well in the center. In a small bowl, combine the ricotta, milk, linseed oil, and the egg and beat with a fork until smooth. Pour the ricotta mixture into the well. Combine with a dough whisk (see page 30) or a fork, stirring from the center and gradually incorporating the flour from the sides until a fairly moist dough comes together.

To prepare the dough by food processor: Place the spelt flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar in the bowl and process for about 10 seconds. In a small bowl, combine the ricotta, milk, linseed oil, and the egg and beat with a fork until smooth. Pour the ricotta mixture across the top of the flour mixture and pulse, in 1-second intervals, just until a ball forms, 5 to 10

pulses. The dough will be fairly moist.

2. Transfer the dough to a well-floured work surface. Lightly flour your hands and briefly knead 5 to 7 turns to get a smooth yet slightly tacky dough. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for 30 to 45 minutes to allow the bran in the flour to soften.

3. Meanwhile, place a baking stone on a rack on the bottom shelf and preheat oven to 425°F. Liberally sprinkle a pizza peel with coarse cornmeal. Finely chop the white and light green parts of the green onions until you have 1/2 cup. Combine them with the sour cream, capers, and 1/4 teaspoon of the pepper in a small bowl. Finely chop the dark green parts as well (about 1/4 cup) and set aside for garnish.

4. Unwrap the dough, transfer to a lightly floured work surface and cut into 2 pieces. Keep 1 piece covered with plastic wrap. Lightly flour your hands and briefly knead the other until smooth, 7 to 10 turns. Using a rolling pin, roll the dough into an elongated pizza, 11 by 8 inches and about 1/4 inch thick. Do this in stages, occasionally turning the dough over and rolling it out further, lightly flouring your work surface and the rolling pin each time. Place the dough on the pizza peel. Spread half of the sour cream topping across, leaving a 1/2-inch border. Cover with half of the apple slices, top with half of the fennel slices, and sprinkle with half of the prosciutto. Brush the border with oil.

5. Slide the dough onto the baking stone and bake until the fennel just starts to brown at the edges and the rim turns golden brown and starts to crisp—it should yield when pressed with a finger—about 15 minutes. Use a large spatula to lift the edges of the pizza so you can slide the peel underneath; carefully transfer the pizza to a wooden board. Sprinkle with half of the reserved green onions and 1/4 teaspoon of the pepper. Cut with a sharp knife and serve at once. Repeat with the second pizza.

to get a head start: The dough, as in steps 1 and 2, can be prepared 1 day ahead. Chill, wrapped in plastic wrap. Remove the dough from the fridge and unwrap; flatten it slightly, and allow to come room temperature while you prep the ingredients and preheat the oven, about 1 hour.

to lighten it up: Feel free to use part-skim ricotta, lowfat milk, and lowfat sour cream, but do not use nonfat.

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Faith Durand

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