Overnight pear focaccia  
Makes one 9 X 13-inch focaccia

I love that this dough can be made the night before so you can wake up on a Sunday morning and have it ready a few hours later without much fuss. Winter is a great time to bring family members and other hangers-on together for breakfast. Mine like nothing better than a Sunday morning sleep-in, so while they are sawing logs, the early riser (moi) can have this focaccia ready for a pleasant mid-morning feast.

You could vary the dried fruits to include your favorites and you could substitute apples for the pears. You may notice that the recipe does not require much yeast—a testament to the fact that many recipes for bread call for more than is needed, lending an over-yeasty taste in the bargain. Instant dry yeast is a special strain that can be mixed straight into the flour, but if you are using ‘regular’ active dry yeast, add it to the liquid and let it hydrate and soften for 5 minutes before incorporating it into the dough.

DOUGH

1/2 cup (65g) raisins
1/2 cup (75g) dried fruit such as apricots, cherries, or prunes, cut in 1/4-inch dice
About 1/2 cup hot apple cider, water or tea
2 cups (250g) bread or all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon (3g) instant dry yeast
1/2 teaspoon (3g) salt
3 tablespoons (43g) soft, unsalted butter plus a little for the baking pan
1 egg
3 tablespoons (65g) honey

1. Combine the raisins and diced fruit in a small bowl. Add the hot cider, tea or water to cover. Let stand until tepid, about 20 minutes. Drain and reserve the liquid.

2. Stir the flour, yeast and salt together in a large bowl. Add the butter and rub it in with your fingers until the mixture looks like coarse breadcrumbs. Stir in the drained fruit to coat it evenly with flour.

3. Measure the reserved soaking liquid from the fruit to make 1/3 cup (add additional liquid if necessary.) Add it to the dough with the egg and honey. Stir with a wooden spoon to form a soft dough. Scrape the dough into a large, clean bowl and enclose the bowl in a plastic bag. Let rise at room temperature overnight (8 to 12 hours).
TOPPING
1/2 cup (45g) sliced almonds
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
3 tablespoons (38g) sugar
1/2 teaspoon (1g) cinnamon
3 to 4 pears (I used bosc and did not peel them, for a rustic effect)

1. In a bowl, toss the almonds with the vanilla. Add the sugar and cinnamon and toss to coat the almonds with sugar.

2. Core and slice the pears into 1/4-inch thick slices.

ASSEMBLE AND BAKE

1. Half an hour before the end of the rising time, set a rack in the middle position of the oven and set the oven temperature at 400 degrees F. Butter a 9 by 13-inch baking pan.

2. Scrape the dough into the pan in one piece. Wet your hands (to keep them from sticking to the dough) and stretch and press the dough evenly into the pan. Place the pears in an overlapping pattern to cover the dough. Sprinkle the almond topping over the pears. Cover the pan with plastic wrap and let rise for 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

3. Bake the focaccia for 35 to 45 minutes, until the edges are nicely browned and the pears are soft. Cut in slices and serve warm or at room temperature.

Soak the dried fruit in hot liquid to reconstitute it in some cider, water, wine, or fragrant tea like earl grey, or Kusmi bouquet de fleurs.
Get in the habit of weighing ingredients when you bake. You will have better results.

Mix the drained fruit with the flour to distribute it evenly. Reserve the liquid to add to the dough.

Add the liquid ingredients to the flour/fruit. Stir well; no special mixer required!
It looks a lot like thick chocolate chip cookie dough. Transfer it to a clean bowl and enclose the whole bowl in a plastic bag. Leave it to rise overnight at room temperature.

The dough has risen; it is approximately double its original size.

To obtain pretty, even slices, cut pear in half. Place melon baller over the core and press straight all the way down into the pear. Then twist and remove the core. Place the pear with the flat side down and cut into 1/4-inch slices.
Wet your hands to keep them from sticking to the dough and push and stretch the dough into the bottom of the pan. Arrange the pear slices on top and sprinkle with the almond topping. Bake.

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