

The Best Apple Pie

Makes 1 glorious pie – serves 8

We've often admired the stunning presentation of others' apple pies – the ones chock full of fruit -- so, of course, we had to give it a try ourselves! This generously-filled pie gives new meaning to the notion of apple pie. For starters, it answers the problem of the all-too-frequent dilemma of a fruit pie slice with only 3-4 pieces of fruit inside. Plus, we've made a cream cheese-based crust that complements the apple and cinnamon flavors to perfection. Follow these directions that include a few key tips for making this delicious, well-filled pie.

Cream Cheese Crust Ingredients:

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon sugar
2 teaspoons Kosher salt
12 oz. (1.5 pkg) cream cheese
1.5 cups unsalted butter (3 sticks), well chilled
1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar

Apple Pie Filling

7-9 large apples, peeled, cored, thinly sliced (about 10 cups)
(about 1/3 cooking apples, 2/3 crisp apples)
3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
1/2 cup water
1/4 cup white sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon Kosher salt
4 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoons cinnamon
3-4 tablespoons cornstarch

Crust Assembly and Topping:

1 egg, beaten well
1 tablespoon coarse, white sugar for crust topping

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Directions:

1. Place the flour, sugar, and salt in the bowl of the food processor. Pulse a few times to evenly distribute the sugar and salt. (Or, if mixing by hand, simply whisk the dry ingredients.)
2. Cut the butter and cream cheese into 1/2-inch cubes. Use a little of the flour mixture to keep the pieces from sticking together. Chill the cut butter and cream cheese cubes for 15 minutes.
3. Place the butter and cream cheese cubes in the food processor with the flour mixture. Sprinkle the top with a splash of apple cider vinegar. Pulse 6-8 times to cut the butter and cream cheese into the flour. The dough mixture will be coarse crumbs with some pea-sized pieces of butter and cream cheese remaining. Resist the urge to keep pulsing. (Or, if mixing by hand use a pastry blender to cut the flour into the butter and cream cheese until a coarse crumb develops.)
4. Remove the crumbs from the bowl and form into a ball using your hands and a light touch. Cut the dough into two equal pieces. Flatten each dough piece into a rough disk about a half-inch thick, and wrap each piece separately in plastic wrap.
5. Chill the wrapped dough disks for an hour, overnight, or up to 2 days.

Preparing the Filling:

6. Peel, core, and thinly slice the apples. Place them in a large pot with the water, apple cider vinegar, and white sugar. Cover and cook the apples over medium heat until the apples are tender to the tip of a sharp knife, but not falling apart.
7. Cool the cooked apples completely by removing from them from the pot with a slotted spoon and spreading them on a large sheet pan. Remove and reserve any pan juices.
8. Measure 1 cup of the apple juices into a small bowl. Discard any remaining juices. (If needed, add water to the apple juices to make 1 cup of liquid.) Place the measured liquid back into the cooking pot. Add the brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt, and butter.
9. Warm the sweetened, spiced juices until the sugar is dissolved and barely simmer until the liquid reduces and becomes syrupy. Remove from heat and toss with the cooled apples. (The juices may be thick, but once combined with the apples in the pie, additional juices will be released and will thin the sauce.) At this stage, if desired, package the apples filling and refrigerate a day ahead of baking.

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10. Remove the dough from the refrigerator when ready to assemble the pie and allow it to warm slightly until pliable and easy to roll out.

11. Roll out one disk of the pie dough to a 1/4-inch thickness. Line the bottom of a 10" diameter deep dish pie plate leaving a generous 2-3-inch overhang. Brush the top edge of the bottom crust with a little water to assist in sealing with the top crust.

12. Toss the cornstarch with the cooled apples. Fill the pie crust with the cooked apples and sauce mounding them in the center.

13. Roll out the second disk of pie dough to a 1/4-inch thickness and an approximate diameter of 14-inches. You may impress a design on the top crust at this point if desired. Transfer this rolled crust to the top of the pie by draping the crust over a rolling pin and carefully placing.

14. Press the top crust edge to the bottom crust with a light finger press. Remove excess pie dough away from the edge of the pie plate using a scissors or knife. Crimp the layers together with a fork, finger pinch, or your favorite edge treatment.

15. Cut steam holes in the top crust with the tip of a sharp knife. Brush the crust with the beaten egg. (A teaspoon or two of water will help the beaten egg to be easier to brush.) Lightly sprinkle coarse sugar over the top of the pie.

16. Bake the pie in a 400°F oven on a rack positioned in the bottom third of the oven, (to help the bottom crust to bake), for 65-75 minutes. The upper crust will brown quickly; after the first 20 minutes place a pie shield (or strips of aluminum foil) over the outer edges and loosely tent a piece of aluminum foil over the entire pie. Protecting the upper crust will allow the apples and bottom crust to bake adequately. If additional top crust browning is desired, remove the pie shield/foil tent during the last 5 minutes of baking.

17. Cool the pie on a cooling rack for 2-3 hours before serving. Or, make the pie ahead of time the day before; this will help the pie and juices to set.