

Pie Crust

We went blueberry picking recently and got a ton of blueberries. So we made blueberry muffins and blueberry pie – a family favorite. We like blueberries so much that I once tried to plant several bushes in my yard but it was a constant struggle with the wildlife. I would watch out my window looking for the sneaky birds that would try to grab my two blueberries that were ripening (that's in the whole yard not per bush). As soon as I would see a bird swooping in I would run out like a crazy woman screaming at the birds. Imagine the Alfred Hitchcock movie but in reverse. I put netting over my blueberry bushes and would dole out one blueberry per child (I only had two children at the time). But then I trapped a snake in my netting and I really didn't want to see those blueberry bushes ever again. So now, instead, we drive an hour to pick blueberries.

I recently posted my rules for a successful pie crust but I am posting them again today along with a video tutorial for making the dough. I will post another tutorial soon about rolling out the dough and assembling the pie so stay tuned. The pie dough recipe itself is not the key to success. So you can use any straightforward recipe you like that has flour, salt, butter, water and sometimes sugar. There is no need for vinegar or vodka or the like that is added to shorten the gluten strands and make it easier to roll out.

The whole process of making the dough took less than 15 minutes. I've obviously trimmed the video so that you actually still want to make pie by the end as opposed to falling asleep. You can make the dough ahead of time and leave it in the fridge for 2 days or make it and use it after 30 minutes of chilling. Either way, I have found the most success when the dough is at 60F before rolling it out.

Sometimes that means using it right out of the fridge but if it has been there for 2 days you might need 30 minutes or

longer to get it to the right temp.

1. When making pie dough a "minimal touching" approach is best. Most pie dough recipes usually have a butter content of around 60% (butter to flour, that is) which means temperature control is key. The butter needs to stay cool during the entire process of making the dough. Also, achieving a flaky crust means maintaining pockets of butter between layers of dough. When that dough then goes in the oven the steam from the butter "inflates" the layers of dough thereby creating the flakiness. If you knead that dough or overwork it you are eliminating those precious pockets of butter and essentially creating a mealy cookie dough. Which is ok if you are making pate sucee but not a flaky pie crust.

So, keep your hands off the dough. You are just going to gather the dough into a ball then smear it briefly.

That's it. Don't worry if it looks rough.

2. The other important factor in making pie dough is moving the dough while rolling it. On a well floured surface, start rolling it out into a circle, then pick it up and move it a quarter turn. Make sure it's not sticking to the surface by flinging more flour underneath if necessary. Keep rolling and turning it until you get it to size. If its too warm the fat will start to soften and it will be difficult to roll out. Put it back in the fridge for a few minutes. If you have a digital thermometer you are looking for a dough temp of about 55-60F. If it is too

cold it will start to crack.
Give it another five minutes on the bench.

3. Let's talk fat. The butter should be diced into 1/4" cubes (I'm serious about this, use a ruler). Also, the fat has to be well chilled before using it because you will be working it into the flour and that will create heat. You can do this in the food processor which will be faster. But doing it by hand will give you a better feel for it. Imagine that every bit of flour needs to be coated with fat but you don't want the fat pieces to be so small that it just turns into a cookie. So in this tutorial you will see that I rub in 3/4 of the butter until the mixture resembles cornmeal but the rest of the butter is left pea-sized.

<http://thecakedr.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Pie-crust.mp4>

Vegan Apple Pie

It took me a long time to learn how to make my own pie crust.

It was very frustrating trying different recipes – all promising to be “perfect” and “fool-proof.” I tried vodka,

apple cider vinegar, rolling it between parchment paper, pressing it in, you name it. Then I learned that the trick was not in the recipe but in the technique. When making pie dough a “minimal touching” approach is best. The doughs usually have a butter content of around 60% (butter to flour, that is) which means temperature control is key. The butter needs to stay cool during the entire process of making the dough. Also, achieving a flaky crust means maintaining pockets of butter between layers of dough. When that dough then goes in the oven the steam from the butter “inflates” the layers of dough thereby creating the flakiness. If you knead that dough or overwork it you are eliminating those precious pockets of butter and essentially creating a mealy cookie dough. Which is ok if you are making pate sucee but not a flaky pie crust. So, keep your hands off the dough. You are just going to gather the dough into a ball then smear it briefly. That’s it. Don’t worry if it looks rough.

The other important factor in making pie dough is moving the dough while rolling it. On a well floured surface, start rolling it out into a circle, then pick it up and move it a quarter turn. Make sure it’s not sticking to the surface by flinging more flour underneath if necessary. Keep rolling and turning it until you get it to size. If its too warm the fat will start to soften and it will be difficult to roll out.

Put it back in the fridge for a few minutes. If you have a digital thermometer you are looking for a dough temp of about 60F. If it is too cold it will start to crack. Give it another five minutes on the bench.

Let’s talk fat. The fat has to be well chilled before incorporating it because you will be working it into the flour and that will create heat. You can do this in the food processor which will be faster. But doing it by hand will give you a better feel for it. Imagine that every bit of flour needs to be coated with fat but you don’t want the fat pieces to be so small that it just turns into a cookie. You want to

end up with pea-sized and walnut-sized pieces. I'll be honest. I don't like to use shortening if I don't have to. I prefer all butter crusts. But many, many pie crusts are made with shortening because it is easier to roll out and produces a flakier crust.

No crazy stories before church today except the usual comment – in a falsetto voice that doesn't sound anything like me – about how long it was supposed to take to bake the pies versus how long it actually took and a bonus comment this week about baking not being the exact science that it is said to be (or some annoying nonsense to that effect). Since Husband insists on taking some credit for my bakes in some shape or form he will get a nod for the combination of apples he picked for “that perfect contrast of sweet and sour.” By the way, if you will make a lot of apple pies, tarts, applesauce, etc. I highly recommend you invest in the [Kitchenaid spiralizer attachment.](#)

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Pie Crust



Ah, the inexorable pursuit of the perfect pie crust. Only slightly less frustrating than macarons. But after many Thanksgivings and Christmases of aggravation with tearing and shrinking dough I finally figured out the simple mistakes I was making. As a cake decorating instructor recently said very poignantly “with pastry its all about temperature.” So simple and so simple to brush off but so true.

My mistake was in letting the dough warm up and touching it too much. I’ve learned to pulse the flour, cold butter and cold water in the food processor until it just pulls from the sides. I then dump it out on the counter and quickly bring it together in a ball. I wrap it with saran wrap and then press it into a disc with the saran wrap over it. So, you see, I barely lay my hands on it or overwork it. I try to chill it for only half an hour and then roll it out as quickly as I can. If I leave it in the fridge for more than half an hour then I have to leave it out for about 15 minutes before I roll it out. If you don’t let over-chilled dough warm up enough it will crumble. If you let it warm up too much the butter will soften and the dough will tear.

After you roll it out and lay it in your pie plate chill it for another 30 minutes before baking. This will keep it from shrinking in the oven. This is especially important if your dough is heavy in butter. The recipe I’m using now for a

single crust:

1 1/2 cups flour

7 Tbsp butter

pinch of salt

1/4 cup water plus 1-2 Tbsp if necessary

I get a very tasty pie crust which is flaky enough even without shortening or lard of which I'm not particularly fond.

The picture above is what was left of a lattice crust salted caramel and apple pie. Happy Thanksgiving!