



EASY AS...

Is there any dessert so personal, so forgiving, and so open to experimentation? *Real Simple's* **BIGGEST-EVER GUIDE TO PIES** lets you take the lead. Riff on a family recipe, discover a new tradition, or put your own spin on a store-bought pie. There's only one rule: If it's imperfect, you've got it just right.

RECIPES BY Dawn Perry
PHOTOGRAPHS BY Johnny Miller



See recipe,
page 125

BASIC PIECRUST

ACTIVE TIME: 10 MINUTES
TOTAL TIME: 2 HOURS,
10 MINUTES
MAKES ENOUGH FOR
2 SINGLE-CRUST PIES OR
1 DOUBLE-CRUST PIE

- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 Tbsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into ½-in. pieces
- ¼–½ cup ice water

COMBINE flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor and pulse to combine. Add butter and pulse until most of the butter is the size of peas, about 20 times. Drizzle in 2 tablespoons ice water and pulse to combine. Continue, adding 1 or 2 tablespoons ice water at a time, until dough just comes together when squeezed in the palm of your hand (it should be pretty sandy).

DUMP dough out onto the counter and divide into 2 piles. Transfer 1 pile to a large sheet of plastic wrap. Use the plastic wrap to gather dough together, using your knuckles to help press dough into a disk. Wrap tightly with plastic and repeat with remaining pile of dough. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours or up to 3 days (or freeze for up to 1 month).

HOW TO MAKE THE CRUST BY HAND



START WITH A LIGHT TOUCH
To avoid overworking the dough, use a fork to gently mix the water into the butter-flour mixture until it just starts to stick together.



THEN BE FIRM BUT GENTLE
Dump the shaggy mixture onto plastic wrap and use your knuckles to press the dough, rotating and pressing until it's mostly stuck together.



SEAL THE DEAL
Wrap up the dough (a circle or square is OK) and give the packet a few presses on top and the sides to compress together.



Fear Not the Pastry

BY NAOMI DUGUID

I am sometimes shocked by how easy it is to feel intimidated in the kitchen. Some people fear bread making; for others, the idea of improvising is terrifying. Those fears can seep into us, paralyzing us, sometimes even before we're aware of ourselves as cooks. At least that's what happened to me with pastry. I remember my English-born grandmother, who lived in a log cabin in northern British Columbia, Canada, and cooked on a wood stove, saying dismissively, "The pastry's tough," about the crust on her delicious treacle tart. This point seemed to matter to her, though I didn't understand what she was talking about, because her tart was delicate and wonderful. And I sometimes heard my mother say admiringly of a friend, "She has such a light touch with pastry!"

All this added up to a minefield. I internalized the impossibility of making good pastry, for it clearly required an inherent talent. And of course I was sure I didn't have such a thing. If my mother, who was a wonderful natural cook, was intimidated by pastry, how could I ever imagine making it myself?

When I started work 15 years ago on the pastry chapters in *HomeBaking*, the cookbook I coauthored with Jeffrey Alford (who avoided the pastry section altogether), I realized I had to change my attitude. By then, after years of trying to persuade cooks to be unafraid of flatbreads and rice, I understood that cooking fears were in our minds and that they could (and should) be vanquished with hands-on practice and experimentation.

I used the trial-and-error method to teach myself pastry. That is, rather than believing in the mystique, I decided not to worry about failure and instead experiment. I consulted books to get ideas, and then I worked to feel rather than precise measurement. I made pastry with butter only, with lard, with a blend of the two. I used cream cheese and butter in combination, a foolproof method. I made French-style *pâte sucrée*, a much better choice when your filling is very liquid. I loved the *fraisage*—smearing—technique that you use to blend the butter and egg into the flour. I learned that adding an egg rather than water to moisten the dough is a kind of insurance when using whole-wheat or rye flour for pastry.

I discovered that there are many kinds of excellent pastry, that whole-wheat flour can make a delicious piecrust, that grating chilled butter (a technique suggested by Jane Grigson in her *Fruit Book*) is the easiest way to make pure-butter pastry. But most important, I learned that "absence of worry" is the single best ingredient in pastry making.

NAOMI DUGUID IS THE AUTHOR OF EIGHT COOKBOOKS, INCLUDING *BURMA AND TASTE OF PERSIA*.

No time for the rolling pin? Check out our favorite press-in crusts at realsimple.com/cookiecrust.

FOOD STYLING BY REBECCA JURKEVICH; PROP STYLING BY GLEN PROEBSTAL; ILLUSTRATIONS BY JANICE WU; PREVIOUS SPREAD: M. CROW PARING KNIFE



PRO TIP
 Always bake pies on the bottom rack. The heat radiating off the bottom of the oven will help ensure a crisp, golden brown crust.



**CRANBERRY-
 STRAWBERRY
 CRUMB PIE**



**COCONUT-
 CASHEW PIE**

All pies need time to set up in order to achieve tidy slices. For the best results, let them cool for at least 4 hours or overnight.



**BROWN
 BUTTER &
 VANILLA
 PEAR PIE**

For pie recipes, turn the page.



GET AN EDGE
 Use a fork, a spoon, or fingers to shape a homey crimped crust. For something fancier, snip dough at 1-inch intervals and fold every other section in toward the center. Brush with beaten egg for a shiny finish.

BROWN BUTTER & VANILLA PEAR PIE

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MINUTES
TOTAL TIME: 2 HOURS,
PLUS COOLING
SERVES: 8

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 2½ lb. pears (about 5), peeled, cored, and chopped
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and chopped
- 3 Tbsp. all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling
- 1 Tbsp. pure vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ cup sugar, plus more for sprinkling
- 2 disks Basic Piecrust
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten

PREHEAT oven to 350°F with rack in lowest position. Melt butter in a medium skillet over medium heat, swirling until golden and nutty smelling, 3 to 4 minutes. Pour into a bowl and let cool.

TOSS pears, apples, flour, vanilla, salt, brown butter, and ¼ cup sugar in a large bowl.

ROLL out 1 disk of piecrust on a lightly floured work surface to about 14 inches in diameter. Place in a 9-inch pie plate; trim dough to a 1-inch overhang. Fill crust with pear mixture. Roll out remaining disk to about 12 inches in diameter and lay over pears. Fold top edge over and tuck under bottom edge; crimp edge as desired. Cut a few vents in the top and brush with beaten egg. Sprinkle with about 1 tablespoon more sugar and freeze for 15 minutes.

BAKE on bottom rack until deep golden brown and juices start bubbling through the cracks, 60 to 75 minutes. Let cool for at least 4 hours before slicing.

FAT MATTERS

We like an all-butter crust for its unmatched rich flavor, but you can use an equal amount of shortening (or leaf lard if you can find it) in its place.



COCONUT-CASHEW PIE

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MINUTES
TOTAL TIME: 90 MINUTES,
PLUS COOLING
SERVES: 8

- 1 disk Basic Piecrust
- All-purpose flour, for rolling
- ¾ cup dark brown sugar
- ¾ cup light corn syrup
- 3 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- 1½ cups roasted unsalted cashews, chopped
- ¾ cup coconut chips

PREHEAT oven to 325°F with rack in lowest position. Roll out piecrust on a lightly floured work surface to about 14 inches in diameter; place in a 9-inch pie plate. Using your fingers, tuck overhang under so crust just covers the lip of the plate. Crimp edge and freeze for 15 minutes.

WHISK together brown sugar, corn syrup, butter, eggs, vanilla, and salt until evenly combined. Scatter cashews and coconut chips over crust and pour brown sugar mixture over top, tilting plate so it settles evenly.

BAKE on bottom rack until crust is golden and filling is set in the middle, 50 to 60 minutes. Let cool for at least 4 hours before slicing.

CRANBERRY-STRAWBERRY CRUMB PIE

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MINUTES
TOTAL TIME: 2 HOURS,
PLUS COOLING
SERVES: 8

- 1 disk Basic Piecrust
- All-purpose flour, for rolling
- 12 oz. fresh or frozen cranberries
- 12 oz. frozen strawberries
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt

Crumb topping

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground ginger
- Pinch of kosher salt
- ¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, softened

PREHEAT oven to 350°F with rack in lowest position. Roll out piecrust on a lightly floured work surface to about 14 inches in diameter; place in a 9-inch pie plate. Using your fingers, tuck overhang under so crust just covers the lip of the plate. Crimp edge and freeze for 15 minutes.

TOSS cranberries, strawberries, sugar, cornstarch, and salt in a large bowl. Transfer to frozen pie shell and return to freezer.

MEANWHILE, make the crumb topping: Combine flour, sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and salt in a medium bowl. Add butter and use your fingers to work it into dry ingredients until clumps form. Remove pie from freezer, scatter crumb topping over fruit, and place pie on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake until crust and topping are golden brown and fruit is bubbling, 75 to 85 minutes. Let cool for at least 4 hours before slicing.



The Worst Pies in New York

BY ALEXANDER CHEE

The pies my mother made when I was a child are clear in my mind, both my favorites and the ones I never cared for—apple, of course, spicy with cinnamon, at one end, and mincemeat, which I endured but never liked as well as she did, at the other. In between was blueberry, usually served in the summer, with blueberries we picked for her from the marshy hills near our town's dump, in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, where the bushes grew thick and the berries were darkly sweet. And strawberry and strawberry-rhubarb. The pies were a family effort: We prepared them together, cutting the apples into half-moons or pinching the tops of the strawberries and twisting them to remove the stems. We ate our first slices at dessert, before fighting over them as they grew smaller, engaging in a sort of bureaucracy of pie. My mom will still stand in the kitchen with a slice in the morning and say, with a grin, "My uncle always said you could have pie for breakfast."

As she grew older and we moved out, my mother left off cooking pies as much. Soon my brother began to insist on doing it himself when he returned home. He showed up one holiday with his own pie plate, like a DJ with a turntable, and proceeded to make a truly fantastic apple pie. But when I returned to my New York City kitchen and tried to recall how the crusts were made, I drew a blank. While my mother had taught me many recipes, she never showed me how to make her perfect piecrust or a filling.

I tried, on my brother's example, to make my own, following a stranger's instructions in some cookbook exactly. But my crust, while golden brown, was as thick as a wallet, and the filling runny. So I have taken to making easy crimped galettes and fruit crumbles, but inevitably each of them only reminds me that I do not know the true method for making a pie. Only this summer did I discover the magic of tapioca, which dries out the fruit just enough that the filling does not become a fruit sloppy joe.

I could chalk up the talent for pie to being like carrying a tune—that is, something I can do that my brother and my mother cannot, though their pies do sing. But I think the better, more fun thing for me to do is to finally ask her to reveal all her secrets and see if she'll tell them to me.

ALEXANDER CHEE IS THE AUTHOR OF TWO NOVELS, *EDINBURGH* AND *THE QUEEN OF THE NIGHT*.

NONSTICK TRICK

Use a stainless bench scraper or large-headed spatula to loosen the dough periodically as you roll to prevent it from sticking to your (lightly floured) work surface.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: WILLIAMS-SONOMA FIRE KING GLASS PIE DISH; WILLIAMS-SONOMA WS STONEWARE PIE DISH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JANICE WU



**THE JACKSON
POLLOCK**

Drizzle or splatter
melted chocolate
(milk, dark, white)
over the cooled pie.



UPCYCLE

Use a cookie cutter
to punch out leaves
or other autumn
shapes from your
dough trimmings
(make small
multiples or one big
cutout). Brush with
egg, sprinkle with
cinnamon sugar,
and bake at 350°F
on a parchment-
lined baking sheet
until golden brown.
Lay gently over the
top of your pie.



**THE GOLDEN
TOUCH**

Top with homemade
meringue and pop
under the broiler
for about a minute
until golden.

How to Dress Up a Pie

USE ONE OF THESE FIVE EASY IDEAS TO
BEAUTIFY A STORE-BOUGHT PUMPKIN PIE—OR SAVE
ONE THAT CRACKED WHILE COOKING.



ADD VOLUME

No one will care
where the pie
came from if the
whipped cream
is homemade.
For every cup of
heavy cream, add
1 tablespoon of
confectioners'
sugar and a splash
of vanilla extract,
and beat until soft
peaks form. Serve
alongside the pie or
dolloped on top.
Chocolate shavings
optional.



**GO CLASSIC
FRENCH**

Sprinkle with
granulated sugar
and broil until sugar
has deeply
browned. Let cool
for a crackly crème
brûlée effect.



Pies for the Homesick

FOUR WRITERS ON THE FAMILY RECIPES THEY CAN'T QUIT.

SOUR CREAM RAISIN

By Paula Forbes

It was always there, spinning endlessly in the Wisconsin diner pie cases of my youth: sour cream raisin pie. Sometimes, seasonally, there would be sour cream raspberry or sour cream strawberry. But as befits a cold place, the dried-fruit version reigned.

I never ordered it as a kid. It seemed stuffy and old-fashioned, a relic from days when winters in America's Dairyland meant pies filled with cream from the farm, dried fruit...and not much else. But the older, and more homesick, I get, the more I'm drawn to this Northwoods specialty.

A sour cream custard laced with cinnamon and studded with raisins—I've heard it called Midwestern buttermilk pie. That's not quite right, though. It's more luscious, more decadent. It's often topped with whipped cream or a tower of meringue; less frequently, it's served in warmed slices on the brink of separation, in a loose, almost indecent slurry of dairy and fruit.

I make it for Thanksgiving now, swapping the raisins for (Wisconsin grown!) dried cranberries. The cinnamon gives it enough holiday accent to sit next to its apple and pumpkin cousins on the buffet, and it's unique without being nontraditional.

It's home for the holidays, if just for dessert.

PAULA FORBES IS A FOOD WRITER. HER FORTHCOMING BOOK *THE AUSTIN COOKBOOK* WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE SPRING.

COCONUT CREAM

By Sara Austin

My great-grandmother Alma didn't leave behind photos. Her wedding dress has disintegrated into shreds of old silk. But her cream pies are forever.

There are no secret ingredients here. Sugar, eggs, scalded milk—Great-Grandma was cooking on a farm in turn-of-the-century Macon, Georgia, so she had no need to get fancy. Armed with Alma's recipes and a double boiler, my mother and grandmother magicked these basics into chocolate, banana, and coconut cream pies. I loved the coconut best, flavored with vanilla and lemon, finished in the oven with a fluffy meringue, and refrigerated as long as your patience holds out.

Alma's daughter would marry a man raised in a cabin in Tennessee. Their daughter would settle in Maryland. Her daughter—me—would make a home in a cramped apartment in New York. There are 130 years and nearly 1,000 northward miles between my great-grandmother's life in Macon and mine in Manhattan, but for an afternoon, this pie unites us.

SARA AUSTIN IS THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR OF *REAL SIMPLE*.



BLUEBERRY

By Kaitlyn Greenidge

My mother is a supremely confident cook. The best dishes she makes are her pies. Sweet potato, apple, and that New England specialty, blueberry, are where her work shines.

The afternoon before Thanksgiving, all the women in my family gather at her house. We were all initiated into her kitchen by learning first how to make a piecrust. This lesson begins early: My nieces started at age 2; I think I was 4. She shows us how to mince the butter with flour in a bowl, how to flatten it with a 30-year-old yellowing plastic rolling pin, and how to lay the crust in the bottom of a glass pan, fill it with sugared and thawed blueberries, top with generous pats of butter, and cover it all with another grand cape of pastry.

The best part, though, is that she lets the children play with the scraps of raw piecrust. Today my niece, ever the sensible one, makes mini blueberry pies with hers. But when I was young, the greatest Thanksgiving treasure was the discards of pie dough, rolled flat and dusted with cinnamon, cooked in the bottom of the oven, and gobbled at midnight, just as the turkey was finally dressed.

KAITLYN GREENIDGE IS THE AUTHOR OF *WE LOVE YOU, CHARLIE FREEMAN*.

LEMON MERINGUE

By Mimi Sheraton

No matter how many exquisite and exotic pies I have been lucky enough to try, none invoke nostalgia as much as the lemon meringue pie that my mother made. A great cook and baker who was also adept at apple, peach, and plum pies, she considered this lemon meringue her signature. It was present at every special occasion and expected of her at the home dinner parties she was invited to.

Based on a recipe from the label on cans of Eagle Brand Sweetened Condensed Milk, she added more lemon zest and made her crisp, buttery, short piecrust for the base. My father was proud of the



golden peaks she always maintained on the meringue.

It was these memories that inspired me to include it in my book *1,000 Foods to Eat Before You Die*. I have made it often, never forgetting the way my mother looked working in the kitchen, her serious demeanor as she beat the whites, and the sigh of satisfaction from everyone lucky enough to share her refreshingly piquant dessert.

MIMI SHERATON IS A FOOD CRITIC AND THE AUTHOR, MOST RECENTLY, OF *1,000 FOODS TO EAT BEFORE YOU DIE*.

WILLIAMS-SONOMA 10-PIECE GLASS MIXING BOWL SET

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JANICE WU