

Easy As Pie? Not!



I am a cook, not a baker. I have tried many times to do some serious baking and have always found it way too frustrating with mediocre results. Maybe it is because baking requires accuracy and I tend to “create” as I go along. All summer long, I would go to the farm stands here in the Hamptons and look longingly at the beautiful freshly made pies for sale. I thought, this is silly, I am going to figure out how to bake a great pie!

Now first of all, most pies I have eaten have doughy mushy crusts on the bottom of the pie and I end up just eating the filling and throwing the crust away. I will also freely admit, that out of pure laziness for years when I wanted to make a pie I would end up buying the Pillsbury pre-made pie crust in the grocery store. One day last month I noticed an article in the East Hampton Star, our local newspaper, that Leslie Dumont of Proud To Be Flaky, was offering a pie making class in her home for just four people. I jumped on the computer to book a spot and was lucky enough to be one of the four pie students!

Leslie was a great teacher. Her view of pie is that it is all about the crust and the technique for making the crust that is the secret to a pie regardless of the filling. What I learned was invaluable. To make a great flaky pie crust requires time, a few special tools and practice.

First of all, the easiest way to make the dough is in the food processor to get the dough to the right consistency. Next, the butter needs to be cut into small cubes and returned to the refrigerator for about an hour before making the dough. Also, the number of pulses when you add the butter to the flour mixture is critical to not over process the dough. Adding the water by digging a little well on the side of the food

processor bowl is important so that it will incorporate better and not just gum up around the blade of the food processor.



When the dough is ready to form a ball, the secret to a flaky crust is the “shove”. The recipe makes two crusts so after you divide the dough on your work surface, which at this point the dough is crumbly, you pull the dough together with your hands and form a ball. Once you have formed the ball you take the heel of your hand and give the dough a firm shove. Pull back together as a ball and repeat the shove. Just twice, that’s it. Then form a ball again and take a large piece of plastic wrap and put the ball in the center and loosely fold the sides so you have a little package and take the package and form the ball into a uniform disc.

Here is where the time comes in. The dough discs need to go back into the refrigerator for at least an hour before you can roll out the crust. After an hour, take two large pieces of parchment paper (it needs to be extra wide which can be found at Williams-Sonoma) and dust some flour on the bottom piece and place the disc on the parchment paper and dust the top of the disc with flour and place the second piece of parchment paper on top. Now you can start rolling the pie crust out. You will need to stop and pull away the parchment and add more flour as you roll so the dough doesn’t stick to the parchment paper. I usually flip the whole thing over when re-dusting the bottom of the crust. After the crust is rolled, the parchment paper with the rolled dough inside needs to go back into the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes but up to an hour.

Here are a couple of tools that are important. First is a pizza stone. The pizza stone needs to be sitting on the bottom

of the oven floor and the stove needs to preheat for an hour to ensure that the stone is very hot which helps to “cook” the bottom of the crust. Make sure you take the racks out of the oven before you preheat it as you can access the pie in the hot oven more easily. Second, while there are many fancy pie pans, the one that will give you the best result is just a plain old Pyrex pie pan you can buy in the grocery store for \$3.00. Believe it or not, it really makes a difference. The last tool that is helpful is a pie crust protector. Williams-Sonoma has a nice silicone one that fits the Pyrex pie pan just right.

This pie crust will work for any type of pie you want to make. When you are ready to put the pie in the oven, place the pie on a rimmed cookie sheet because if the pie bubbles over it

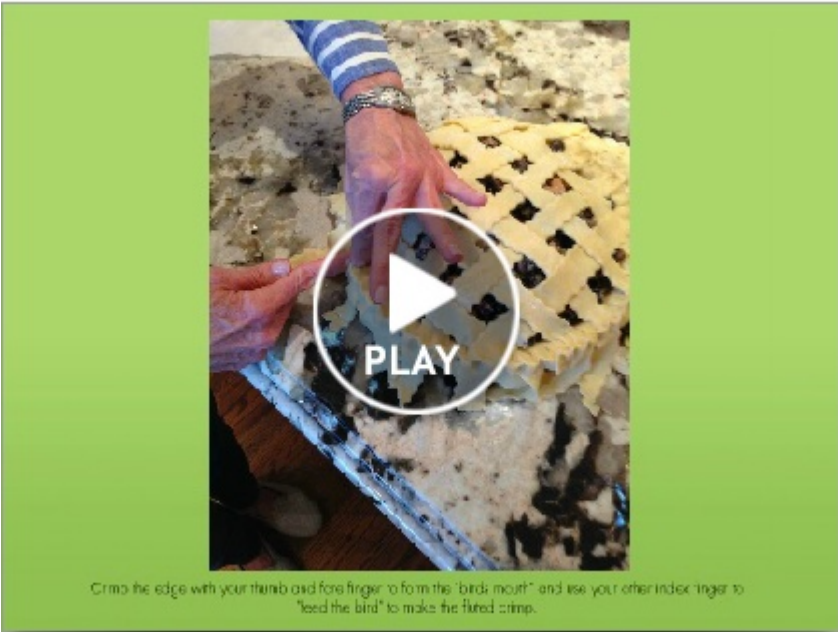


will not ruin the pizza stone and will stay in the cookie sheet. Actually, the first time I made a pie on my own after taking the class, it did bubble over, but the pie turned out fine. So if yours does don't worry about it.



I've made a pie every week since taking the class. The first time I was a little apprehensive that mine may not turn out as well as Leslie's, but it was just fine. After doing several different pies I now look forward to making them and trying new fillings, doing a lattice crust, crumb crusts, you name it. I also love to see the satisfaction of eating a good homemade pie on the faces of my family and friends. The pie crust is crisp and has a nutty flavor that is hard to describe. So just get in the kitchen and make your own pie and fill your kitchen with an amazing aroma that will have

everyone asking when will it be done.



Crimp the edge with your thumb and fore finger to form the "bird's mouth" and use your other index finger to "feed the bird" to make the fluted crimp.

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Here are a couple of recipes that you can try for Thanksgiving this year for your family. I also made, just this week as a dry run, the pumpkin pie using the recipe on the back of the Libby Pure Pumpkin can and it was delicious. Wouldn't change a thing.



Leslie converted me to a Pie devotee. I hope you will be converted too!

PIE CRUST – makes two pie crusts, enough for two single crust pies or one double crust pie.

2 1/2 cups all-purpose, unbleached, flour
2 sticks plus 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup ice water

Cut chilled butter into cubes by cutting in half lengthwise and cut the two halves lengthwise again and then cut into small cubes and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

Combine dry ingredients in food processor with a few pulses.

Add butter cubes and pulse until pieces of butter are small (the size of peas). This will take about 20 – 40 pulses depending on how cold the butter is.

Make a small well in the dough away from the blades of the food processor and add half the water and pulse four times. Make another well and add balance of the water and pulse until dough just begins to hold together – it will still be crumbly at this stage.

Spill dough out onto the counter and form into two equal size mounds. Gather mounds into your hands and gently form them into a ball. Once you have formed the ball you take the heel of your hand and give the dough a firm shove pull back together as a ball and repeat the shove. Then form a ball again and take a large piece of plastic wrap and put the ball in the center and loosely fold the sides so you have a little package and take the package and form the ball into a uniform disc. Refrigerate the discs for at least one hour before rolling.

After an hour, take two large pieces of parchment paper (it needs to be extra wide which can be found at Williams-Sonoma) and dust some flour on the bottom piece and place the disc on the parchment paper and dust the top of the disc with flour and place the second piece of parchment paper on top. Now you can start rolling the pie crust out. Stop and pull away the parchment and add more flour as you roll so the dough doesn't stick to the parchment paper. I usually flip the whole thing over when re-dusting the bottom of the crust. After the crust

is rolled, the parchment paper with the rolled dough inside needs to go back into the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes but up to an hour.

Note: Dough discs can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 days and in the freezer for up to 3 months.

Charleston Apple Pie, Weezer Style

7 Honey Crisp apples or 6-7 cups, peeled and sliced

3/4 cup sugar

1/4 cup light brown sugar

2 tbsp all purpose flour

3/4 tsp ground cinnamon

1/4 tsp salt

1/8 tsp ground nutmeg

zest of one lemon

2 tbsp lemon juice

Topping:

1 1/2 cups all purpose flour

3/4 cup sugar

3/4 cup light brown sugar

1/2 tsp salt

1 cup oatmeal

1/2 lb. cold unsalted butter, diced

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees for one hour with pizza stone on oven floor. Remove oven racks.

Place 1 pie crust in ungreased 9 inch glass pie pan. Press gently but firmly against side and bottom

In large bowl, gently mix filling ingredients; spoon into crust lined pie pan.

To make topping, combine the flour, sugars, salt, oatmeal and cold butter in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Mix on low speed until the mixture is

crumbly and the butter is the size of peas. You can use a pastry cutter instead of electric mixer to obtain the same result.

Scatter the topping over the apples and press firmly to ensure that topping forms a top crust. Place the pie on a rimmed cookie sheet, place the cookie sheet with pie on pizza stone and bake at 400 degrees for 1 hour. Check after 30 minutes to make sure topping is just browned and cover with foil to prevent excessive browning. If the top does not need to be covered with foil, but the crimp/crust edges are very brown put on the pie crust protector. Cool on rack at least 2 hours before serving. Serve with vanilla ice cream!

Berry Pie

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees for one hour with pizza stone on oven floor. Remove oven racks.

Place 1 pie crust in ungreased 9 inch glass pie pan. Press gently but firmly against side and bottom

5 1/2 cups of berries (blueberry, blackberry or raspberry – or any combination that you like)

3 tbsp cornstarch

3/4 tsp cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 tbsp lemon juice

1 tbsp melted butter

Egg white wash

Whipped cream

Combine all dry ingredients in a large bowl. Gently rinse berries and add to bowl. Toss to coat and then add lemon and melted butter.

Pour into prepared pie pan with dough. Cover top with either another round of dough or a lattice top. Brush with egg white wash. Place the pie on a rimmed cookie sheet, place the cookie

sheet with pie on pizza stone and bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes (or until the crust begins to brown). Reduce heat to 375 and bake another 45 minutes (until fruit juices are bubbling and begun to thicken). Check after 15 minutes to make sure the crimp/crust edges are very brown, if so put on the pie crust protector. If the crimp/crust edges isn't brown enough yet, check again in 10 minutes.

Remove from the oven and allow to cool for at least a half hour. Serve with whipped cream.