

Perfect Pie Crust

Makes 1 double-crust 9 inch pie
(Recipe from The Martha Stewart Cookbook)

Many years ago, while embarking on a quest for the perfect pie crust, I found this recipe in a Martha Stewart cookbook. It is hands down the best pie crust recipe I have ever tasted.

The original recipe described both a hand mix method and a food processor method. I've developed my own method using my Kitchen Aid. It calls for unsalted butter, but I've used salted interchangeably with equal success.

2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
12 tablespoons (1 1/2 sticks) chilled butter
3 tablespoons chilled shortening
1/4 cup ice water

Kitchen Aid Method:

Cut the butter into 1/2" pieces. Place it in the bowl of a Kitchen Aid mixer. Add the shortening then the flour and salt and pulse to mix. Gradually, a drop or two at a time, add the ice water. Mix only until all the flour is incorporated.

Do not over-mix. There should be chunks of butter visible.

Wrap in plastic wrap and chill for at least 1 hour.

Hand Method:

If you don't have a heavy duty stand mixer, this can easily be mixed by hand.

Place the butter pieces, shortening, flour and salt in a mixing bowl. Use a pastry knife to cut the butter and shortening into the flour until it resembles very course meal and small chunks of butter are still visible. Add the water drop by drop until, pressing the dough into a ball. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill for at least 1 hour.

Remove the crust from the refrigerator. If it's chilled for a very long time, allow it to rest for 10 minutes before handling.

Lightly flour a work surface. Divide the pastry into two balls. Pat each piece into a flat round then roll the dough until it's 1/8" thick and slightly larger than a pie plate.

Fold dough in half and lift into the pie plate. Crimp the edges. Using a fork, pierce the dough around the edges and across the bottom.

Line the pie plate with heavy duty aluminum, so the dough does not shrink when baking.

Bake at 415 degrees until the pie is slightly golden, approximately 15 minutes. Remove the foil and continue baking until golden brown.

Cool.

Granny's Fresh Strawberry Pie

Make the Puree

2 cups fresh strawberry puree. An immersion blender or food processor work well to make the puree

1 cup of granulated sugar

1/3 cup of corn starch

1 1/2 cup of warm water

Place the berries and sugar in a pan.

Mix the corn starch with warm water and stir until smooth.

Add to the berries and whisk until well incorporated. The mixture will be cloudy.

Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly and cook until thick and slightly more clear.

Set aside and allow to cool. The pan can be placed in a cold water bath to speed the cooling.

Make the Cream Cheese Mix

Mix 2 packages of cream cheese with 1 cup of powdered sugar and blend until smooth.

Place half of the mix into each of the cooled pie crusts and smooth evenly.

Final Steps

Clean fresh strawberries and remove the stems. If the berries are small, leave them whole. If they are large, cut them in half from top to bottom.

Place fresh strawberries evenly around the cream cheese mixture.

Top with the cooled puree and refrigerate for several hours.

Serve with whipped cream.

Tip: When strawberries are in season and more affordable, puree the strawberries. Place 2 cups in a freezer bag and freeze. When ready to use, thaw, add the other ingredients and proceed with the recipe.