

Friends International - Dundee

APPLE PIE

My husband, who is a Scot and an excellent cook, tells me that this is not a traditional Scottish dish. Perhaps he suspects it might (like me) be English! However, apple pie is something Scots people eat a lot. My father in law always asked for it if it was on the menu. In my experience, all Scottish people enjoy something sweet after a meal, so I shall include apple pie.

You will need:

- *Either* one pack of shortcrust pastry from the supermarket (fresh or frozen pastry will both work well) *or* 8 ounces plain flour, 4 ounces butter or margarine, a little salt, a little sugar and a small quantity of water in a cup.
- Two very large cooking apples or three slightly smaller ones. Cooking apples have a sharper taste and stronger flavour than ordinary apples. Most shops sell Bramley apples which are good for this recipe.
- A little sugar.
- Very small amounts of spices, possibly cinnamon, ginger and/or nutmeg. British people only add a small amount of these spices so that the apple flavour is strongest. In other European countries more cinnamon is sometimes used with excellent results.

Heat up your oven to 200 degrees Centigrade, 400 degrees Fahrenheit or gas mark 6.

The pastry:

The secret of good pastry is to keep it cool until it is ready to go into the oven and then to bake it quickly in a very hot oven. The sudden change in temperature ensures that all the flour is cooked quickly at the same time. The mixture should not be too sticky or too dry or it will not roll out well and will not hold together in a sheet. Cover all utensils, your rolling board, your baking dish and even your hands with a little flour before touching the pastry or it will stick to them.

The pastry in the shops is very good but if you want to make your own pastry you will have to practice until you get the right "feel" and the right flavour.

To make your own pastry, place the flour in a large mixing bowl. Cut the butter into very small pieces with a knife and add it to the flour. Stir it in with the knife, breaking up any large lumps. If you are using softer margarine it is easier to add the margarine in one go, then cut it up in the flour.

The way the flour and fat are mixed is called "rubbing in." Wash your hands and dry them then put a little flour on your hands. Use only your finger tips or your hand might warm the mixture. Rub the small lumps of butter or margarine between your finger tips so that they mix with the flour. Keep working until there are no more lumps and the whole mixture has a consistency like soft crumbs. If the mixture is sticky, rub in more flour. If it is dry and powdery add more margarine or butter. Squeeze a little of the mixture. It should stick loosely together.

Stir in a little salt and a little sugar. (If you are making pastry for a savoury dish rather than a fruit pie, then miss out the sugar.)

Add a very small quantity of water and stir it in thoroughly. Test a small amount of the mixture. If the mixture will stick together in a flexible, elastic lump you have added enough water. If it is still crumbly add a few more drops of water and stir. Keep testing and adding water until it is ready to roll out. If you add too much water the pastry will stick to everything.

By now most of you will have decided to buy pastry from the shops! There are instructions on the packet but all you need to do is roll out the pastry on a floured board and put the pie together in exactly the same way as I describe below.

Making the pie:

Put flour on a board. Take half of the mixture and squeeze it into a large round ball. Roll it in the flour. Check the board is still well floured. Place the lump in the centre of the board and flatten it.

Put flour on a rolling pin or any other long cylinder (such as a clean bottle) and use it to roll out the pastry into a large thin flat sheet a little larger than the pie dish, bowl or plate that you are going to use. (The dish or plate should be heat proof so it can go into the hot oven.) Cover the surface of the dish or plate with a little flour.

Roll the pastry sheet once round the rolling pin so you can lift it. Use a knife or a flat tool to separate it from the board if it has stuck. Place it in the dish or on the plate and arrange it to fit evenly over the bottom. Trim around the edges. Use the spare pastry to repair any tears or cracks.

Wash and peel the apples. Cut them into quarters and remove the seeds, stems and hard parts of the apple core. Cut the apples into smaller slices.

Arrange the apple slices inside the pie base. Sprinkle a little sugar and a little spice on each layer of fruit.

Roll out the pastry top of the pie in the same way as before.

Use a little water on your finger tip to dampen the pastry round the edges of the bottom half of the pie case.

Lift the pastry top on to the pie. Use your thumbs all around the edges to press down the top layer of pastry on to the edges of the lower layer of pastry. It should stick because of the water you used to dampen the edges. Trim around the edge with a sharp knife.

Make small slits in the top crust of the pie to let out steam.

If the oven has come up to its full temperature, place the pie in the oven. This is quite a large pie so leave it in the oven for 25 minutes. After 10 - 15 minutes the pastry will be fully cooked so you can turn the temperature down to 180 degrees Centigrade, 350 degrees Fahrenheit or gas mark 4 so that the pastry does not become scorched in the heat.

You can serve the pie hot with cream, ice cream or custard or on its own. Or you can serve it cold later.

Now you know how we make our pies you can make many other traditional Scottish dishes.

You can fill the pie with other fruit such as apricots, pears, or rhubarb stems (washed and peeled and chopped up).

If you use no sugar when making the pastry, you can make pies with savoury fillings.

Cut meat into small pieces and fry it with onions, carrots and other vegetables. Add a little water or stock and continue cooking to allow it to thicken. Add pepper, salt, mustard, herbs and other seasonings then place this in the pie.

Remove the bones from fish such as cod, haddock, lemon sole or salmon and smear the surfaces in a little olive oil or an oily sauce such as mayonnaise. Add pepper and salt with herbs such as parsley or chives. Place the uncooked fish in the pie case. This pie will need a longer cooking time, even one hour, but remember to reduce the temperature after 15 minutes.

To make open tarts, use half the amount of pastry and make only the bottom half of the pie case. Bake the empty pie case in the hot oven for only five minutes. Put in the fruit filling. Return it to the oven for only 10 minutes at the lower temperature.

If I can include an English recipe, I guess there is nothing to stop you contributing a recipe from your country. E-mail us if you can!

If you would like details of events being organised by Friends International Dundee or of interest to International students, if you would like to read about interesting places to visit in Dundee and the surrounding area or if you want to try out some more of our own Scottish recipes please visit our web site at www.friendsinternational-dundee.org.uk. The site also contains details of coming events of interest to International students, useful contacts and website addresses.