

# *The Art of Pastry Pie: A Heritage Tradition*

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## *Educational Objectives*

- Participants will learn about the history of pastry
- Participants will learn the secrets to a successful pastry crust.
- Participants will learn recipes for traditional American pies.

Pastry pies are one of the most loved foods in the world. The art of the pie spans many centuries and civilizations. Is it any wonder that there are so many variations and flavors?

The pastry is the shell that covers a variety of fillings. Variations of simple ingredients from ancient times have been used to create pastries in many cultures.

## **History**

The history of the pastry pie is long and fascinating. The Egyptians are credited with creating the first pie as we know it today. They used wheat, oats, barley, or rye and a filling of honey. An Egyptian chicken pie recipe was discovered on a tablet dating earlier than 2000 BC.

The Ancient Greeks created a pie pastry as described in Aristophanes' writings. Romans made a pastry of flour, oil, and water to cover up meat. The pastry covering was designed to preserve the filling's flavor and juices, rather than to be eaten. Apicius, a Roman cookbook from the first century, refers to pie cases in some recipes. Roads came with the Romans, and thus their pie recipes were found throughout Europe.

The first pies in England were mostly meat fillings, and the pastry coverings weren't made for eating but for helping food last longer. They were made with more crust than filling, and supposedly preserved their fillings on long sea voyages. Pies were referred to as "coffyns" or "coffins," and if poultry was used, it came with the legs dangling over the pie's sides. The term "coffin" was later replaced with the word "crust."

In medieval times, pies became centerpieces of the meal as cooks strived to outdo each other. Almost anything would be baked into them, and cooks endeavored to impress their audiences when the pastry lid was

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removed and the filling revealed. Supposedly poets or musicians would be hidden in the pie and then revealed after the pastry lid was removed (safely hidden after baking what must have been a very large pie)!

Allegedly, Elizabeth I was the first to be served cherry pie, but there is no reference to whether she enjoyed the taste of it.

As exploration continued throughout the world and people settled in America, the pie recipes came, too. Though the apple pie is associated with America, the recipe dates back to 14th century England, and includes other ingredients, such as pears, figs, and raisins.

Early apple pie recipes did not include sugar. In the early 17th century, the Pilgrims planted orchards, which included apple trees. These trees laid the foundation for the apple to become an important American food and agriculture commodity.

The popular association of apple pie with America dates back to World War II, when soldiers were asked why they were off to battle, they replied, "For mom and apple pie."

In colonial America, new settlers adapted many of the recipes to include local ingredients, such as cornmeal and pumpkins. The abundance of pumpkins in the New World led to pumpkin pie being a staple.

## Pastry Success

A pastry is a stiff dough made with flour, salt, fat, and a liquid. Most pastry is leavened only by the action of steam. Variations of these simple ingredients are used to cover or wrap meat, fruit, and vegetable fillings.

The secrets to an exceptional pie crust are simple ingredients, accurate measurements, and patience. The preparation of pastry dough is more precise than general cooking.

1. Stir flour in the canister and spoon into a measuring cup. Level with a metal spatula. Too much flour will make the pastry tough.

2. Pack the solid shortening into a dry measuring cup to prevent air pockets. Too much shortening makes pastry greasy and crumbly.
3. Fill a small bowl with water and ice. Fill the measuring spoon to the top. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of water at a time over the flour and shortening mixture.
4. Use a pastry blender or a knife and fork to blend in the shortening.
5. When rolling out the pastry, roll from the center to the edge with light, even strokes, forming a circle about 12 inches in diameter.
6. Use a glass pie plate or dull metal pan. Shiny metal keeps the crust from browning properly.
7. To prevent excessive browning on the edge of the pastry, cover it with foil. Pies that bake under 30 minutes do not need the foil shielding.
8. Cool baked crust on a wire rack to allow the air to circulate under the pie and prevent the crust from becoming soggy.



## Tips for Making Fruit Pies

1. Glaze the top of double-crust fruit pies to make them look and taste special. Brush the unbaked top crust with milk, water, or melted butter; then sprinkle lightly with sugar.
2. To avoid messy spills in the oven, set the pie plate on a baking sheet on the oven rack.
3. Fruit pies can be stored at room temperature for a short period of time. Cover and refrigerate any pies with fillings that contain eggs or dairy products.



## A+ Pie Crust – Plain Pastry

½ cup flour

½ teaspoon salt

⅓ cup shortening

2 to 3 tablespoons cold water

1. Blend flour and salt in a mixing bowl.
2. Cut in shortening with pastry blender until the fat is the size of rice kernels.
3. Sprinkle water over the dry mixture, while tossing it with a fork until evenly dispersed.
4. Press mixture into a ball. If desired cover with plastic wrap and chill for one hour.
5. Place ball of dough on a lightly floured sheet of wax paper. Press to flatten the ball and cover with another sheet of wax paper. Roll dough from the center outward, keeping the pastry as round as possible to about 1/8 inch thick.
6. Peel off top layer of waxed paper. Fold pastry in half, remove the other half of waxed paper and transfer to a pie dish. Fit the dough loosely into the pan, pressing gently from the center edges to the outer edges to remove any air between the pastry and the pan. To prevent shrinking while baking, pastry must not be stretched.
7. If necessary, trim pastry edge with scissors, leaving 1 inch of pastry hanging over the edge.
8. Fold overhanging pastry back on itself. Edge may be pressed down with fork tines, crumped or edged with a pastry wheel.
9. If baking the pastry shell before baking, prick with a fork. Bake pastry in a hot oven at 450 degrees for 12 to 15 minutes or until lightly browned. If pastry bulges away from the pan during the first 4 to 5 minutes of baking, prick more holes in the bulging areas.
10. If filling a pastry do not prick the shell. Follow directions for the filling and bake.

This recipe makes one pie shell, double the recipe for a covered pie.

## Apple Pie

6 cups thinly sliced, peeled cooking apples      ½ to 1 teaspoon cinnamon

½ cup sugar      Dash nutmeg

2 tablespoons flour      Pastry for double-crust pie  
1 tablespoon butter

1. If apples lack tartness, sprinkle with 1 tablespoon lemon juice, if desired.
2. Combine sugar, flour, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Add the mixture to the sliced apples; toss to coat fruit.
3. Fill a pastry lined 9-inch pie plate with the apple mixture and dot with butter. Adjust top crust. Seal and flute edge. Sprinkle a little sugar on top. Cover the edge of pie with foil.
4. Bake in a 375-degree oven for 25 minutes. Remove foil; bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until crust is golden.
5. Cool and serve with milk or ice cream.  
Serves 8.

## Old-Fashioned Strawberry Rhubarb Pie

2 pints strawberries, halved      ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

1 pound rhubarb (without tops), cut into ½ inch pieces, or 1 16-ounce package frozen rhubarb      ¼ teaspoon salt

1 ¼ cups sugar      Pastry for 9-inch double-crust pie

⅓ cup all-purpose flour      1 tablespoon butter or margarine, cut into bits

2 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca      1 tablespoon milk or half and half

1. In large bowl, with rubber spatula, gently toss strawberries, rhubarb, sugar, flour, tapioca, vanilla, and salt to mix well. Let mixture stand 30 minutes to soften tapioca, stirring occasionally so tapioca will be evenly moistened.
2. Prepare pastry for double-crust pie. On lightly floured surface, with floured rolling pin, roll two-thirds of pastry into round about



2 ½ inches larger than 9 ½-inch pie plate that's 1 ½ inches deep. Line pie plate with pastry; trim pastry edge, leaving 1 inch overhang. Spoon fruit mixture into piecrust; dot fruit with butter or margarine.

3. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Prepare remaining pastry and place on top of the pie.
4. Brush pastry (not edge) with milk or half and half.
5. Bake pie for 50 minutes or until fruit mixture begins to bubble and crust is golden. Cool pie on wire rack for 1 hour; serve warm or cool completely to serve later.

*Recipe Source: The New Good Housekeeping Cookbook, 1986*

## Coconut Cream Pie

¾ cup sugar	4 eggs
¼ cup cornstarch	1 ½ teaspoons vanilla
¼ teaspoon salt	1 ⅓ cup flaked coconut, divided
3 cups milk	1 9-inch baked pastry shell

1. In a medium saucepan combine sugar, corn starch egg yolks and milk. Stir constantly over medium heat until thick and bubbly. Reduce heat; cook and stir 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in coconut, and if desired vanilla.
2. Pour hot filling into baked pastry shell. Spread meringue over hot filling; seal to edge. Sprinkle 1/3 cup coconut on top. Bake in 350-degree oven for 12 to 15 minutes. Cool 4 to 6 hours at room temperature, then cover and refrigerate before serving.

## Meringue Recipe

4 egg whites

½ teaspoon vanilla

3 tablespoons sugar

In a small bowl beat the eggs whites and vanilla to a soft peak. Gradually add the sugar a tablespoon at a time beating at high speed until stiff peaks form. Immediately spread over hot filling. To prevent weeping, spread on hot filling to the edge of the pastry shell. Sprinkle the top with coconut. Bake in 350-degree oven for 10 minutes or until the meringue starts to brown lightly.

*Recipe from Aggie Pownell, Hardy County with permission from the family.*

## Activities:

- Share stories about your favorite type of pie.
- Demonstrate making a pie crust.
- Ask volunteers to bring samples of their favorite pie.

## Resources

Bitesize, B. (2019, September 5). A shortcut history of pies – BBC Bitesize. BBC Bitesize. [bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zmtn2sg#:~:text=The%20Ancient%20Egyptians%20created%20the,separate%20trade%20to%20a%20baker](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zmtn2sg#:~:text=The%20Ancient%20Egyptians%20created%20the,separate%20trade%20to%20a%20baker).

The New Good Housekeeping Cookbook, 1986

Better Homes and Gardens New Cookbook, 3rd Printing (1981). Meredith Corporation, Des Moines, Iowa.

A Good Bake: The Art and Science of Making Perfect Pastries, Cakes, Cookies and Pies – by Melissa Weller and Carolyn Carreno (November 17, 2020)

Pastry (definition and history) – Britannica, [britannica.com/topic/pastry](https://www.britannica.com/topic/pastry)

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