

Medieval Pies for the Holidays

By Euriol of Lothian

As we find ourselves once more entering the Fifth season, I would share with you some of my favorite pie recipes that I have made over the years inspired by culinary recipes as noted in manuscripts from the Middle Ages & Renaissance. I will begin with sharing my experience in discovering the process of making a reliable pie crust.

Pie Crusts – The foundation of any tasty pie

I used to find making a pie crust a very frustrating experience. Since I was 10 I could nearly cook anything I found in a cookbook, but I couldn't make a pie crust to save my soul. No matter how I tried, they never made it from the board to the pie pan, and that was a good attempt. Otherwise it would fall apart as I was attempting to roll it out, or it wouldn't roll out. I gave up by the time I was 15, I thought it would just be easier to buy one at the store and be done with the trouble.

Shortly after discovering the SCA, I finally saw someone make a pie crust. I had never been shown how to make one before. What I discovered was that my technique was all wrong. I made some bad assumptions; such as stirring is so much easier than cutting. What difference would it make anyway? I finally learned how important these differences are.

You might ask yourself, "What is the difference between stirring and cutting the ingredients together?" The simple answer is you stir with a spoon, and cut with a knife. Or in the case of making a pie crust, usually two knives, almost in a scissors like fashion (I personally use a pastry cutter, which is a D shaped utensil, with the handle as the back of the D, and several (about 5) dull blades on the curve of the D).

With stirring, you push the ingredients together causing them to bind to each other. With cutting, you make your sticky ingredient into smaller and smaller bits, and coating each bit with the dry ingredients. I personally like to get my bits down to the size of small gravel, no larger than rock salt. When you have sufficiently cut the ingredients, then you use your hands with usually a small quantity of water, and pat the bits into a ball to be rolled out, (usually after letting the pastry sitting for several minutes).

The main difference between stirring and cutting flour in a pastry, is that stirring can cause the gluten in the flour to activate and produce a rubbery texture. This texture I enjoy in breads and pasta. The flour you see in the store labeled "Better for Breads" is a high gluten flour. You can even buy gluten to add to all-purpose flour when you are using it to make breads. Kneading dough for bread is even better for activating the gluten in flour than stirring.

Cutting minimizes the the activation of the gluten, the flour does not have the tendency to bind together, which in turn provides the flaky pie crust.

Nowadays I hardly give a thought to making a pie crust. But the lesson I learned was that understanding how ingredients react under different treatments is very important.

Paest Royall – A Royal Pie Crust

This pie crust is inspired by a recipe taken from *A Proper Newe Booke of Cokerye*, a 16th century English manuscript.

1 cup flour	2 egg yolks
½ cup butter	2 to 2½ Tbsp. water, ice cold

Cut butter and egg yolks into flour until crumbly, add water and knead mixture until it forms a ball of dough. Wrap dough in plastic wrap and let rest in refrigerator for 15-30 minutes. Roll out dough then place into pie pan.

Recipes

Torta Bianca - Ginger Cheesecake

There are quite a few “cheesecake” recipes in a number of culinary manuscripts, even dating back to Roman times. Although in modern times we refer to them as “cakes”, they truly fall under the category of tarts. This tart is inspired by a recipe found in *Libro de arte coquinaria* by Maestro Martino de Como, a 15th century Italian manuscript.

18 oz. ricotta cheese	¾ cup sugar
6 large egg whites	¾ cup butter
2 Tbsp. powdered ginger	2 Tbsp. Rosewater
½ cup milk	2 Tbsp. fine sugar
1 pie crust	

Beat in cheese and eggs together until smooth. Add ginger, milk and butter to the egg and cheese mixture and mix well. Pour the mixture into the pie crust and bake at 350°F for 50-55 minutes. Just after the torta comes out of the oven sprinkle with rosewater and fine sugar. Yields 1 9 inch torta.

Dariolles - Custard Tart

Dariolles (Daryoles, Daryols or Darioles) are a custard tart. Most of the recipes I found have the same basic ingredients of a milk product, eggs and spices. Three recipes I found include date and strawberries (if they were in season). Below is a recipe of one of the fruit dariolles. This custard tart is inspired by a recipe found in *Cookery Book II Harleian MS. 4016*, a 15th century English manuscript.

½ cup wine	1 Tbsp. butter
½ cup broth	1½ cups cream
¼ tsp. ground cloves	4 egg yolks
¼ tsp. ground mace	1 cup minced dates
¼ powdered ginger	1 cup minced strawberries (optional)
8 threads of saffron	1 pie crust

Combine wine, broth, and spices into a sauce pan. Bring to a boil and let cool. Make single serving size tart shells of the pastry recipe. Prick the shell, and evenly distribute the minced dates and strawberries amongst the shells and bake at 425°F for 10-15 minutes (until the shells start to turn brown). In separate bowl, beat together cream and egg yolks. Once the wine mixture has cooled to a warm temperature combine with the cream and egg mixture, the evenly distribute this mixture into the shells and bake at 425°F for 20-25 minutes (until a toothpick inserted comes out clean).

Tarte of Strawberries – Strawberry Pie

This pie is inspired by a recipe found in the book *Sallets Humbles & Shrewsbury Cakes*, which is a collection of 16th century English recipes.

1 quart strawberries	1 tsp cinnamon
½ cup red wine	1 tsp ginger
½ cup sugar	1 pie crust

Blind bake the pie crust by, pricking it with a fork or place rice or beans in bottom of pie dish and bake at 375°F for 15-20 minutes. Wash strawberries and remove greens. Leave small strawberries whole, otherwise quarter larger strawberries. Mix strawberries, wine, sugar, cinnamon and ginger together. Place in pie crust and bake at 375°F for 5-10 minutes.

Ain fast gúten torten von epffel zú machen – Apple Pie

This pie is inspired by a recipe found in *Das Kochbuch der Sabina Welserin*, a German manuscript published in 1553.

2 pounds apples	1 tsp cinnamon
½ cup sugar	2 pie crust

Peel, core and cut apples into pieces. Add sugar & cinnamon to apples and mix thoroughly. Place one pie crust into pie plate. Pour apple and spice mixture into pie plate, cover with second pie crust. Cut slits into top crust for venting. Bake at 425°F for 50 – 60 minutes

Sources & Resources

For more information about these recipes, and other online resources, please visit my website at <https://sites.google.com/site/medievalcuisine>

Enjoy!