

BUSYCOOK Meals in a hurry



It's easy as pie

Try baking your own chicken pie this week

THERE'S something about a piece of pie that is satisfying, and full of goodness.

Singaporeans may not idolise apple pie like our American friends, but we are pretty much taken with pies, the savoury kind.

We all know of several bakeries in town which have made their reputations just on their chicken pies.

But let me tell you. There's nothing to beat a homemade pie, bursting with meat, vegetables and juices, with a wonderful flaky, buttery crust.

The scent of baking is the best air freshener any home can have.

All you have to do to bake your own pie is to understand the basics.

There are

pies with top and bottom crusts. There are pies which wear only a pastry hat and there are naked pies with just a lattice of flaky strips on top.

For most savoury pies, I like using just a pastry topping. I find pastry bottoms get soggy in the cooking and caked dough doesn't taste good.

I prefer puff pastry because it's lighter and the kids love the fluffy, crispy layers. So do I.

The variety of filling is only limited by your imagination. My favourite chicken pie has chunks of breast fillets, whole mushrooms, diced carrots and potatoes and lots of green peas.

That way, I get the family to eat their quota of vegetables without too much fuss.

And the real secret is a can of cream soup, used undiluted for full flavour. You don't need anything else!

To hold the filling together, I

add a beaten egg just before baking.

Remember to leave a little eggwash to brush the top of your pie to give it a nice golden sheen.

If you don't like chicken, you can substitute beef cubes, beef mince or lamb mince.

For the red meats, substitute a can of oxtail soup, and add a pinch of cinnamon to perk up the flavours. And lots of pepper.

Always cook the filling first and let it cool in the pie plate before placing your pastry top on it.

Very hot filling will half-cook the pastry and it will not rise properly.

If you don't like pastries, cover your pie with a mashed potato topping. But that will make it a Shepherd's Pie.

The variations are countless. Go ahead, experiment. You may come up with a new recipe!



by Pauline D Loh

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Homemade Chicken Pie

What you need:

- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 500 gm chicken fillets, cut into chunks
- 1 can button mushrooms
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 carrot, diced
- 2 potatoes, diced
- 1 cup green peas
- 1 egg, beaten
- black pepper
- puff pastry (375 gm packet)

How to cook:

1. Prepare the filling. Brown diced onions in a little oil in a large skillet. Add chicken chunks and stir fry till meat turns colour.
2. Add diced vegetables and mushrooms. Add the undiluted cream soup.
3. Cook ingredients until well blended. Add green peas last.
4. Place filling in pie plates. Set aside to cool. Add the beaten egg to filling.

5. Roll out pastry to half cm thickness. Cut out a generous circle that will cover the pie plate with a little margin. Place on pie. Seal edges by pressing the tines of a fork down on edge of plate.
6. Brush pastry top with remaining egg. Using a knife, cut a few slits for the steam to escape. Place in a hot oven (220 deg C) for 15 minutes or until pastry is risen and puffed up.

Shopping List

- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 500 gm packet chicken fillets
- 1 can button mushrooms
- 1 onion, 1 carrot, 2 potatoes
- 1 pkt green peas
- 1 pkt puff pastry (375 gm packet)



PASTRY BASICS

THE first rite of passage for many pastry chefs is the making of puff pastry — a delicate dough that flakes beautifully and melts in your mouth.

Classic puff pastry begins with a basic dough called *détrempe* (day-tramp). It's rolled around a whole block of butter and repeatedly rolled, folded and turned until the fat is evenly distributed among the paper thin layers of dough.

Thank God for ready rolled puff pastry. For just \$3.60 or so, you save yourself a vast amount of elbow grease and still get a nice flaky pastry crust.

Don't get me wrong. I'm all for home-baking, but I reckon quality time spent with the family around the dinner table is more important than domestic goddesshood.

Puff pastry is good for savoury pies, curry puffs or sausage rolls, and fruit turnovers.

For a good selection of recipes, go to: www.epicurious.com, my favourite site. Simply type "puff pastry" in the search field.

Apart from the garden variety type of chicken pie, you can turn out a dinner party offering with a few clever adaptations.

Here are a couple of suggestions:

Salmon and Creamed Corn

Salmon and creamed corn is a nice combination, and very elegant. It presents well, too with its rich yellow and pinks.

For the filling, buy a fillet of salmon, about 300/400 gm. Clean and cut into 2 cm cubes. Pour one can of creamed corn into the pie plate. Season well with salt and pepper. Add a cup of peas if you like. Scatter the salmon cubes on top of the creamed corn and pour a beaten egg over to hold it together. Top with puff pastry and bake in 180 deg C for 15 minutes.

Vegetarian Puff

Use a combination of vegetables in the pie. Hold it together with a mild cheese such as feta or mozzarella instead of egg. Try spinach and feta for the classic combo, or use onions and potatoes with mozzarella. Simple, but really good.

Short crust pastry is denser and more biscuit-like. Classic uses are for sweet pies and tarts but there's nothing to stop you using it with savoury ingredients. You can buy readymade, but they are so easy to put together that I thought I'd give you a recipe. It's very "throw together". Just remember to use ice-cold water in the mix.

Pie Pastry Recipe

- 1 1/2 cups plain flour
- 1 1/2 tablespoons sugar, or less
- Pinch of salt
- 125 gm cold butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 1/2 tablespoons ice water

1. Put flour, sugar and salt in blender. Add butter pieces. Blend quickly till mixture is crumbly. Beat egg yolk and water together. Add egg mixture to blender and process until mixture clumps together.

2. Take out dough and roll into a ball. Flatten into a circle. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for half an hour. Roll out to fit your pie or tarts. Bake in 180 deg C oven.