

CRUST

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Or season your dough with a little bit of sugar and salt. “Per two balls of dough, or a top and bottom crust, we put two tablespoons of sugar and one teaspoon of salt in our pie crust,” Riccardi said. “The sugar helps with browning the bottom crust, and the salt adds a balancing flavor.”

Vinegar can add seasoning, too, and make the crust easier to shape. “We swap about 10 percent of the water we’re using with apple cider vinegar,” Beresiewicz said. “It has a nice fruitiness that it imparts on the dough, but it also helps to inhibit the gluten from overdeveloping. In the end, you have a dough that’s easier to work with and doesn’t fall apart, which is particularly helpful if you’re doing a lattice crust.”

TECHNIQUE TRICKS

Temperature is crucial. Chill your ingredients — especially the butter — before mixing.

But first, measure everything out. “The less time you give your butter to warm up, the better, so pre-measure it before placing it in the fridge,” O’Hara said. “You also want to have everything else ready to go so that the minute you take the butter out, you can get to work immediately.”

Own a food processor? Try freezing the butter. “We believe we get the best flaky crust when we use a food processor because then we can use frozen butter,” Riccardi said.

Prevent overworking the dough by limiting hands-on time. “When I’m teaching pie classes, I inevitably end up

repeating ‘stop touching it’ throughout the entire class,” Riccardi laughed.

Be stingy with the liquid — adding too much water is one of the most common mistakes. “You want to add slowly — the dough needs to hold together enough for you to roll it out, but too much water will activate the gluten,” O’Hara said.

Use the power of your refrigerator again, before rolling your dough. “I like to let it rest overnight in the fridge, wrapped in Saran wrap,” Riccardi said. “The butter will get nice and hard again, which will make it less messy to roll and also helps maintain the coldness you need to create flakiness.”

Or your freezer. “We shape our dough into a flat disc and then freeze it for at least a couple of hours to make sure the fat gets really cold again,” Halen said. “When we’re ready to roll, we’ll let it sit on the counter for an hour, and then whack it with the rolling pin a few times to flatten it out further. It’s really loud, but it’s a great way to get out some aggression if you’re not in a good mood.”

When rolling, picture your movements shooting out from the center of the dough like the spokes of a bicycle wheel. “You don’t want to simply roll back and forth, or you’ll end up with a rectangle,” Riccardi said. “Work your way out from the center, stopping to rotate the dough as you go.”

Use as little flour as possible to dust your counter space. “Adding too much flour will make your crust tough,” Halen said. “I actually use a tool called a flour wand — one squeeze from the wand

onto the counter does the trick.”

Consider your rolling pin choice wisely. “Most people reach for a ball-bearing pin, but my preference is a tapered French rolling pin. It gives me more control,” Plessis said. “With ball-bearing pins, you’re holding on to these handles, not the rolling pin itself, so it’s harder to direct and apply even pressure.”

Start your oven at a higher temperature than is called for in your recipe. “We’ll start around 400, and then drop it immediately to 325 once the pie is in the oven,” Beresiewicz said. “You want to shock the cold crust with that heat so that the butter quickly melts rather than having it slowly melt into the dough. This process creates the air pockets that develop flakiness.”

MAGPIE’S FLAKY PIE DOUGH

Yields 2 (9-inch) crusts

2½ cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon salt
12 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces and frozen
4 tablespoons vegetable shortening (Crisco)
½ cup ice water

In a food processor, add the flour, sugar, and salt, and pulse for three seconds.

Scatter frozen butter cubes on top of the flour mixture. Pulse six times at one-second intervals, or until butter turns into pea-size pieces. Scatter the shortening over the flour mixture, and pulse again, four times at one-second intervals.

Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and pour the ice water on top. Using a bowl scraper, mix the water into the flour until medium-size curds form. Then use the palm of your hand to flatten and fold the dough over itself until it just comes together and forms one large mass; don’t overwork it.

Divide the dough into two equal discs. Wrap tightly with plastic and refrigerate overnight.

When ready to use, remove dough and place on a lightly floured surface. Using a rolling pin, apply even pressure and gently roll each disk from the center out, rotating the circle as you go to prevent sticking.

— Holly Riccardi, owner of Magpie Artisan Pies

KABOCHA SQUASH PIE FILLING

Yields enough filling for 1 (standard 9-inch) pie

¾ cup sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon ground clove
2 eggs
14 ounces roasted kabocha squash flesh
8 ounces heavy cream
1 parbaked crust

Preheat oven to 350 (or 325 for a convection oven).

Place all of the ingredients in a large bowl, and use an immersion blender to blend them. (You can also use a blender.) Strain through a sieve.

Into a parbaked crust, pour as much batter as will fit into the pie pan without overflowing. Bake for approximately 45 minutes, or until the filling

no longer sloshes around in the pan.

Remove from oven, and allow pie to rest at least two hours before serving. Pie may be baked up to two days in ad-

vance and stored in an airtight container.

— Tova du Plessis, owner of Essen Bakery

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GARDEN

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It is good to use all the experts and helpful information at your disposal. I would think of it as a really big plumbing job.

Gardening Chores and Challenges

- Weave a holiday wreath

of garlic, onions, chili peppers and herbs. It will make a gourmet gift for a lucky friend.

- Fallen, spoiled, or mummified fruits should be cleaned up from the garden and destroyed by burying.
- Mulch strawberries for winter with straw. This should be done after several nights near 20 degrees, but before temperatures drop into the

teens. Apply straw loosely, but thick enough to hide the plants from view.

- Plant tulips and any other spring bulbs before ground freezes.
- Covering garden pools with bird netting will prevent leaves from fouling the water. Oxygen depletion from rotting organic matter can cause winter kill of pond fish.

• Mulch azaleas and rhododendrons with pine needles or oak leaves, or shredded oak bark, but any organic material will do.

• Clean and oil all garden hand tools before storing for winter.

If you have garden questions or comments, please write: greengardencolumn@yahoo.com Thanks for reading!

RECYCLING

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My early adult years were marked by ranch life in Medical Springs. Living on the land without garbage service (other than you-haul to the county landfill) naturally encouraged practical and earth-friendly trash practices. Very little went to waste; food scraps went to the animals or compost and the rest sorted by usable versus not usable. Tin cans were saved for metal patching, glass jars for storage, paper for lighting fires, and cardboard for just about everything. Even the occasional plastic containers were repurposed for a variety of things, from useful plastic patching, cut whirly-gigs as gopher deterrents, or a clothes pin container to hang on the clothes line. Only truly un-

usable items were taken to the landfill and these trips could be counted on one hand for an entire year.

Fast forward to the 21st century! I always felt respectfully responsible and conscientious by saving and taking my recyclables to the recycling center. Acceptable plastics meant I could conveniently not think about my plastic packaging purchases, my overall waste consumption and what might be happening to our landfill. I was doing my part, right? China refusing to take our “recyclable plastic waste” in late 2017 brought the reality of our throw-away society to our own back yard (so to speak): our local landfill. I became painfully aware that I was contributing to the trash piling up at our landfill. I could no longer be smug about having one very small bag for my garbage roll

cart service each week. Very quickly, very suddenly, this because a big problem. What in the heck could we do to reduce the amount of plastic and trash we generate?

This spurred a small group of friends to begin discussing and investigating the issues and possible solutions for us as residents of small rural communities. We knew fundamentally we must work together, as consumers, and as a community, to protect our “back yards” and the land we dearly love. The global plastics crisis hitting us in our own homes spawned a community-based group of interested people wanting more information, more inspiration, more sharing, more action, and above all, more hope; hope that we indeed can be part of the solution and not the problem. Join us on this journey!

DORY

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Does the machinery always work correctly, grabbing the bin securely around the waist with the lid opening and closing at the appropriate times?

Does the person behind the wheel mull over their own trials and irritations or ever have the chance to be pleased with some little thing that happened as he or she, as the case could be, had brightened someone’s day while driving the route?

The day in mention was

the last Tuesday of the month when one such driver was edging his truck down the street from house to house, probably thinking his own thoughts when routine was interrupted.

He slowed the carrier to a stop where once a month he expected to serve. He looked around from his driver’s seat but there were no bins outside so he slowly drove on to the next place.

Glancing in his sidewalk-side mirror after having replaced a bin on the pavement from the second house, he glanced again.

Down the walk from behind his truck came an old white-haired woman running with legs flailing from side to side and arm swinging a plastic bag of garbage and crying out.

He waited. “Can you take it?” she panted, quite out of breath. Pointing at her neighbor’s emptied but open bin he indicated that she could put it in there. She did.

He drew the bin up and over the truck, dropping the belongings into the vehicle and replaced the bin a second time onto the sidewalk.

Then he drove away as the old woman smiled and said “Thanks.”

As far as the 92-year-old woman was concerned, he had just given her a lovely bouquet of flowers by his deed of kindness. He could have ignored her frantic haste and driven on — but he didn’t.

Thank you, good neighbor, for the brief use of your bin.

And, thank you, kind sir. You and your work are greatly appreciated. You are a veteran in your own war and I count you as special among others.

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