



DORY'S DIARY

DOROTHY SWART
FLESHMAN

'Tis the season for holidays

Editor's Note: Although Dory officially retired her column at the end of August, she plans to submit an occasional column.

What a strange day it is today in which so much bumps against the other.

It is Veterans Day in which we honor those who have earned and maintained our country's freedom. I wear a red, white, and blue star necklace and an all-service bracelet in their honor. It becomes a holiday to many like so many other historic dates and yet the stars and stripes flag still waves.

The sun shines brightly to affirm our harvest now gathered in with tree leaves scattered about and branches now bare etched against the sky.

I wear a sweatshirt for working about the house in recognition of the season when the larder needed filling each fall for winter table fare. A row of antlered guests parade across the front of my shirt for the mighty hunters seeking success for their families.

We have just seen through another Halloween and wonder if anyone stood in the garden to watch for a little cartoon boy's Great Pumpkin visit. I limit it to watching the video and think of how we each hope for some miracle of our own.

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BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

Climate control and cacti

This time of year, active gardening usually only takes place inside your house or greenhouse. Frost-tender tropical plants can thrive in the controlled climate of our homes, which are usually low humidity, which mimics desert conditions.

Christmas cactus — *Schumbergera bridgesii*

An old favorite, often sold as *Zygo-cactus truncatus*. In nature these cacti live on trees like some orchids. They come from the jungle, so they need rich, porous soil with plenty of leaf mold and sand.

Keep them damp but not wet, and feed them with liquid fertilizer as often as every seven to 10 days.

Since they need to be grown in the house (or lathhouse or covered terrace in the summer), they're mostly grown in pots. As a container-grown plant, fertilizer given should be half as strong, but can be given twice as often. Otherwise, fertilizer will tend to build up in the container.

Christmas cactus' arching, drooping branches are made up of flattened, scallop-edged, smooth, bright green and spineless 1½-inch joints. Grown right, plants may be 3 feet in diameter and have hundreds of 3-inch, many petaled, long tubed rosy purplish or red flowers at Christmas time.

To ensure bud set for late December bloom, keep the plant where it will receive cool night temperatures (50 to 55 degrees) and 11 to 14 hours of darkness per day in November.

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A Pair Of Pie Recipes For Thanksgiving



Abel Uribe/ChicagoTribune-TNS

This version of pumpkin pie is topped with a nut-free ginger praline, made from ginger snap cookies and crystallized ginger.

HAPPY PIE DAYS

By JeanMarie
Brownson

Chicago Tribune

Homemade pie fillings prove easy. Crust not so much. Practice makes perfect. With every pie, our skills improve. It's an acquired art to turn out flaky, beautiful crust. My mother regularly reminds us of her early crust adventures — many of which ended in the garbage can. No worries, she says, the crust ingredients cost far less than the filling.

So, when time allows, we practice making pie crust hearing her voice remind us to use a gentle hand when gathering the moist dough into a ball and later when rolling it out. Mom always uses a floured rolling cloth on the board and on the rolling pin. These days, I prefer to roll between two sheets of floured wax paper. We factor in plenty of time to refrigerate the dough so it's at the perfect stage for easy rolling. The chilly rest also helps prevent shrinkage in the oven.

I've been using the same pie dough recipe for years now. I like the flakiness I get from vegetable shortening and the flavor of butter, so I use some of each fat. A bit of salt in the crust helps balance sweet fillings. The dough can be made a few days in advance. Soften it at room temperature until pliable enough to roll, but not so soft that it sticks to your work surface.

Of course, when pressed for time, I substitute store-bought frozen crusts. Any freshly baked pie — with or without a homemade crust, is better than most store-bought versions.

I read labels to avoid ingredients I don't want to eat or serve my family. I'm a fan of Trader Joe's ready-to-roll pie crusts sold in freezer cases — both for their clean ingredient line and the baked flavor. The 22-ounce box contains two generous crusts (or one bottom crust and one top or lattice). Other brands, such as Simple Truth Organics, taste fine, but at 15 ounces for two crusts, are best suited for smaller pies. Wewalka brand sells one 9-ounce crust that's relatively easy to work with. Always thaw according to package directions and use a rolling pin or your hands to repair any rips that may occur when unwrapping.

Double-crust fruit pies challenge us to get the thickener amount just right so the pie is not soupy when cut. I'm a huge fan of instant tapioca in most fruit pies because it thickens the juices without adding flavor or a cloudy appearance. In general, I use one

tablespoon instant tapioca for every two cups cut-up raw fruit.

Pretty, lattice-topped pies have the added benefit of allowing more fruit juice evaporation while the pie bakes. Precooking the fruit for any pie helps ensure that the thickener is cooked through; I especially employ this technique when working with cornstarch or flour-thickened pie fillings. This also allows the cook to work in advance — a bonus around the busy holiday season.

We are loving the combination of juicy, sweet Bartlett pears with tart cranberries for a gorgeous pie with hues of pink; a few crisp apples and chewy dried cranberries contribute contrasting textures. Feel free to skip the lattice work and simply add a top crust; pierce the top crust in several places with a fork to allow steam to escape. For added flavor and texture, I brush the top crust with cream and sprinkle it generously with coarse sugar before baking.

The nut-free ginger praline recipe is a riff on a longtime favorite pumpkin pie from Jane Salzfass Freiman, a former Chicago Tribune recipe columnist. She taught us to gussy up the edge of pumpkin pie with nuts, brown sugar and butter. We are employing store-bought ginger snap cookies and crystallized ginger in place of pecans for a spicy, candied edge to contrast the creamy pie interior. Think of this pie as all your favorite coffee shop flavors in one — pumpkin pie spice and gingerbread, topped with whipped cream.

Happy pie days, indeed.

PEAR, DOUBLE CRANBERRY AND APPLE LATTICE PIE

Prep: 1 hour



Abel Uribe/ChicagoTribune-TNS

Pears and cranberries partner for a fall-forward pie of flavor and textural contrasts, with fresh and dried versions of the berries playing off each other.

Chill: 1 hour

Cook: 1 hour

Makes: 8 to 10 servings

1 recipe double-crust pie dough, see recipe 2½ pounds ripe, but still a bit firm, Bartlett pears, about 6 1½ pounds Honeycrisp or Golden Delicious apples, about 4 2 cups fresh cranberries, about 8 ounces 3 tablespoons unsalted butter ¾ cup sugar 3 tablespoons cornstarch 1 cup (4 ounces) dried cranberries ½ teaspoon grated fresh orange zest 1/8 teaspoon salt Cream or milk, coarse sugar (or turbinado sugar)

1. Make pie dough and refrigerate it as directed. Working between two sheets of floured wax paper, roll out one disk into a 12-inch circle. Remove the top sheet of wax paper and use the bottom sheet to flip the crust into a 10-inch pie pan. Gently smooth the crust into the pan, without stretching it. Roll the edge of the dough under so it sits neatly on the edge of the pie dish. Refrigerate.

2. Roll the second disk of pie dough between the sheets of floured wax paper into an 11-inch circle. Slide onto a cookie sheet and refrigerate while you make the filling.

3. Peel and core the pears. Slice into ¼-inch wide wedges; put into a bowl. You should have 6 generous cups. Peel and core the apples. Cut into ¾-inch chunks; you should have about 3½ cups. Add to the pears. Stir in fresh cranberries.

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