

An Unlikely Culinary Column: New Holiday Traditions

By Karen Kain

There are many family traditions at Christmas time centered on food. For my husband one of those foods is mincemeat pie. I lived in England for a year in 2010 and during Christmas time, while getting my hair done, I was offered brandy and a small mincemeat pie whilst waiting. That is up there with one of those moments that I will never forget, it would certainly never happen in the US. I am not a fan of mincemeat, but found myself enjoying the one serving pies that are sold at most shops during the Christmas season.

When I was deciding what holiday recipes I would share with you I decided to have a "mincemeat pie bake off" making a recipe from my husband's favorite chef Delia Smith's vs. an American version. I am posting this column so you can find the ingredients you will need for this recipe. I made my own candied peel because I could not find it at the local markets and it is pretty tasty. We brought suet back from the UK, but you can find it on Amazon for about \$6.00. I highly suggest that you read this recipe at least once thoroughly because there are many steps to it, but actually, it is really easy to make and worth the effort.

About the piecrust, I have been using Martha Stewart's piecrust recipe for about 20 years now, that is until I tasted one of Mimi's pies. She is one fantastic cook and uses Cooks Illustrated piecrust recipe. I have since converted to this recipe and include it here. I was curious about using vodka in the piecrust but I have to say it totally works and I have included the reasons why below. This may be the best piecrust I have ever baked.

I baked these pies over a few days, making the candied peel first, then the crusts, (which you can make and freeze ahead of time) and I cooked the mincemeat over two days. So the question is, "Which pie is better?" My husband enjoyed the fact that the cooking mincemeat was filling our kitchen with lovely aromas and of course getting to taste test it as it stewed. To no surprise he picked Delia's recipe. We had fun taste testing the pies topped with fresh whipped cream agreeing they are both great recipes. The apple cider vinegar gave the American version a tartness that was lovely. I added more nuts to Delia's recipe and appreciated the taste of the additional candied peel. I am pretty

close on both pies, they were equally delicious but I hate to admit that I think Delia's pie wins.

We had lots of fun making these pies and this just may be a new tradition for us. I hope you are all staying warm and preparing for your holiday gatherings.

Foolproof Double Crust Pie Dough

Ingredients:

- 2 ½ Cups all-purpose flour
- 2 Tablespoons sugar
- 1 Teaspoon salt
- 12 Tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ¼ inch pieces and chilled
- 8 Tablespoons vegetable shortening, cut into 4 pieces and chilled
- ¼ Cup vodka, chilled
- ¼ Cup ice water

Why this recipe works -

Using two fats makes the dough flavorful and tender. The butter makes it rich in taste but the water in butter encourages gluten development. Using a 3:2 ratio helps eliminate the gluten process. Also, adding the flour in two batches helps to eliminate toughness and aids in flakiness. The adding of vodka produces a moist and easy to roll out dough that will stay tender. The alcohol vaporizes in the oven and you won't taste it. Making sure you shape the dough into a 4-inch disk before you refrigerate it. And finally roll the dough on a well-floured counter to prevent from sticking.

Directions:

Pulse 1 ½ cups flour, sugar and salt in a food processor until thoroughly combined. Add the butter and shortening on top of the flour. Process until the mixture forms clumps with no floury bits, about 15 seconds.

Scrape down the sides and pulse again. Add the remaining flour and pulse until broken into pieces and evenly distributed. Transfer to a large bowl and sprinkle the vodka and ice water. Using a stiff rubber spatula stir and press dough until it sticks together.

Divide the dough into 2 balls and place on a piece of plastic wrap then flatten into a 4-inch disk. Wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour. When you are ready to roll it out let it sit on the counter for 10 minutes. I also freeze the pie for 15 minutes once it is made then



or refrigerated for several days.

Heat oven to 400°. Once your pie is made, freeze for 15 minutes and bake until crust is light golden brown, 25 minutes. Rotate pie and reduce oven temperature to 350°; continue to bake until juices bubble and crust is deep golden brown, about 35 minutes. Transfer pie to wire rack and cool to room temperature before serving.

bake. Thanks to Cooks Illustrated for this recipe.

Mincemeat Pie

Ingredients:

- Mix together -
- 3 Granny Smith apples, large (about 1 ½ pounds), peeled, cored, and cut into ¼-inch dice
 - 3 McIntosh apples, large (about 1 ½ pounds), peeled, cored, and cut into ¼-inch dice
 - 1 Cup golden raisins
 - 1 Cup currants
 - ¾ Cup packed dark brown sugar (5 ¼ ounces)
 - 8 Tablespoons unsalted butter (1 stick)
 - ¼ Cup diced candied orange peel
 - Grated zest and juice from 1 orange
 - Grated zest and juice from 1 lemon
 - 1 Teaspoon ground cinnamon
 - ½ Teaspoon ground allspice
 - ½ Teaspoon ground ginger
 - ¼ Teaspoon ground cloves
 - ¼ Teaspoon salt
 - 1 Cup apple cider vinegar

Add in later -

- ½ Cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/3 Cup rum or brandy

For the top of the crust-

- 1 Large egg white, lightly beaten
- 1 Tablespoon granulated sugar

Directions:

Place the first 15 ingredients (omitting ½ cup cider, egg white and tablespoon of sugar) in a large, heavy saucepan and bring to boil then simmer gently, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching for 3 hours, (adding more cider as necessary) to prevent scorching. I did not need to add any cider. The mixture should darken in color and be syrupy. Stir in the ½ cup apple cider and rum and cook about 10 minutes; cool mixture. You can freeze

Delia's Homemade Christmas Mincemeat

Ingredients:

- 1 Pound apples, cored chopped into small pieces
- 8 Ounces shredded suet, you can find on Amazon.com, I used vegetable suet
- 1 ¾ Cup raisins
- 1 ¾ Cup Sultanas, I used golden raisins
- 1 ¾ Cup currants
- 8 Ounces whole mixed candied peel, finely chopped, I used orange peel which I made.
- 2 Cups dark brown sugar
- The zest and juice from 2 oranges
- The zest and juice from 2 lemons
- ¾ Cup slivered almonds
- 4 Teaspoons ground allspice
- ½ Teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ Teaspoon grated nutmeg
- 6 Tablespoons brandy

Directions:

Combine all the ingredients, except for the brandy, in a large mixing bowl, stirring until they are mixed together thoroughly.

Cover the bowl with a clean cloth and leave in a cool place for 12 hours or overnight. Pre-heat the oven to 225°. Cover the bowl loosely with foil and place it in the oven for 3 hours, then remove the bowl from the oven. Don't worry about the appearance of the mincemeat, which will look positively swimming in fat. This is how it should look.

As it cools, stir it from time to time; the fat will coagulate and, instead of it being in tiny shreds, it will encase all the other ingredients. When the mincemeat is quite cold, stir well again, adding the brandy.

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