

HOME COOKING CHRONICLES: PIE OF THE TIGER

Crafting a pie crust

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

Summer is pie season. When there's a bounty of fruit and berries, the only thing to do is toss some into a pie crust and bake it. And there's the problem. The crust. It's like booking a tropical vacation and then remembering you're allergic to sand.

I teach pie making. Most students only have a mild interest in pie filling, though. Pie filling is like a crouton. You don't really want it, but you eat it because it's in the salad. Students come to pie class for pie crust. They divulge pie crust stories ranging from triumphant grandmothers that made perfect pie crusts to throwing things and crying in need of a mental health professional in their own kitchen. I've been there.

Pie crust can be frustrating and fussy. And it's never the same two times in a row. So why do we do it? Some say to drive ourselves crazy. I say to practice the craft of baking and to connect us with earlier generations of bakers.

Store bought crust can go wrong, too.



Making the perfect pie crust requires practice.

My friend, Tamra, bought ready-made pie crust in an aluminum tin. During baking, she sent a photo so I could diagnose the problem. The photo was alarming. I saw melted crust cascading down between the tines of the oven rack. It was like a Salvador Dali painting. Apparently, she took the instructions "put the crust directly on the oven rack" literally. We're finally laughing about it after six years.

Skip the ready-made crust and get your hands in some butter and flour. My most

important pie crust lessons are: be gentle with the crust and with yourself, keep your ingredients cold, make sure your oven is at the right temperature and practice. Just like I can't sit at a piano and play "Moonlight Sonata" perfectly the first time (apologies to my childhood piano teacher, Mrs. Barnett), you can't create a perfect pie crust without practice.

A finished pie is the gold medal of home baking. And if it isn't perfect, who cares? Nobody else made a pie, so what can they say to you? Every family needs a pie baker: let it be you. Listening to Survivor's "Eye of Tiger" can help immensely.

Flaky Pie Pastry

Yields one single crust pie

Ingredients

- 12 ½ ounces all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- 8 ounces unsalted butter, cold
- 4 ounces of cold water

Preparation

In a large bowl, combine the flour, salt and sugar and mix until evenly distributed. Set aside.

Cut the butter into 1/2 inch cubes.

Using a pastry cutter, or your hands, cut the butter into the flour mixture. Continue until the butter resembles pea-size pieces.

Drizzle 1/2 of the water over the flour mixture and mix (using a tossing motion) with a fork or a pastry cutter. Add the second half of the water and mix until the dough just comes together.

Wrap the dough in plastic wrap, shaping it into a 1 inch thick disk. Refrigerate for at least two hours for up to two days.

Unwrap the flaky pastry and place on a well-floured surface. Flour the top of the disk. Using a rolling pin, roll the dough starting from the middle of the disk out to the edges. Turn the pastry 45 degrees after each roll to form a circle large enough for your pie pan.

Remove excess flour with a pastry brush. Gently fold the pie crust in quarters and transfer a pie pan. Unfold and gently fit the pastry into the pie plate. Crimp and continue with your favorite pie filling recipe.

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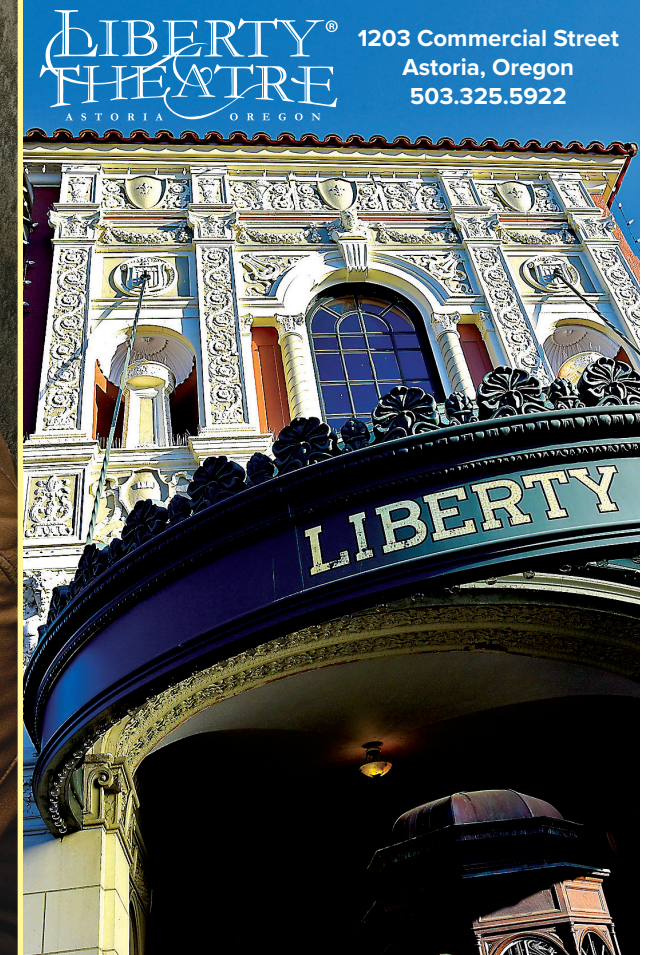


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