

Here are a few tips to help you make a perfect pie crust with a recipe for a 9-inch double crust pie.

- **Necessary tools** You don't need much, but a food processor or a pastry blender are very helpful. If you have neither, I have used 2 knives with success. On the other hand, besides an empty wine bottle, I haven't found a good substitute for a rolling pin, which you'll need to roll out the dough.
- **Cold** Keeping everything cold is half the battle in making excellent dough. If the butter warms up, it can make your dough too soft and it can melt on you. Butter can be cut ahead and put back in the fridge. Even your flour can be refrigerated. And it is essential that the water you add is ice cold. Some people like to make their pies in the morning, before the kitchen heats up. But keeping this tip in mind, if you have to take a break from making your crust, or your pie is ready to go in the oven but it seems a little soft and sticky, place everything into the refrigerator to firm it all up.
- **Butter** I know there are many people who can argue that a combination of butter and shortening or butter and lard make the tenderest, flakiest pie crusts, but you couldn't pay me to eat Crisco or hydrogenated oils and I don't have access to organic lard from grass-fed cows, so that's not an option. Organic butter is a natural, whole food and I'm ok with it in moderation.
- **Flour** Here's the problem. I hardly ever use white flour. It's refined and processed and basically a dead food with no nutrition. I love using whole wheat pastry flour or white whole wheat flours whenever I can in place of white flour, but not in pastry dough. Whole grain flours tend to result in a much drier, more crumbly dough which isn't very easy to roll out. It also tastes more "whole wheat-y" which my family doesn't care for when they're eating an apple pie. If you must include some whole grain in your dessert, you can make the dough with half white and half whole wheat pastry flour. I used to make half my pies like this for Thanksgiving and my sister-in-law and I were the only ones who would eat the wheat ones. What's the point of that? Another option is to use white spelt flour, which is more water soluble than wheat flour, is a little more digestible and has a sweeter flavor. White spelt flour makes very nice pastry. If you just can't go there, fruit crisp is always an option!
- **Water** Pie crust recipes should give you a range for how much water to use because it's impossible for every cook to be working under the same conditions. Moisture is something that will vary in the air, flour and butter that we use. Always start with the lower range of water listed and increase as needed.
- **Don't over mix** Pie crust is not like cake batter. You actually do NOT want to completely blend the butter into the flour. In fact, it is ideal if you have little pea-sized pieces of butter in your dough. When the crust bakes in the oven, the heat will cause the moisture in the butter to steam up, creating the wonderful flakiness you want.
- **Give it a rest** This is a step you don't want to skip since it accomplishes two important things. Allowing your dough to chill out in the refrigerator helps the gluten in the dough relax so you don't have tough pastry and it also firms up that butter again (see second tip

above.) 30-60 minutes is enough time to do this, however you can absolutely refrigerate the dough for a couple of days or freeze it for a few months, if necessary.

- **Rolling it out** If your dough has been in the refrigerator for more than an hour, you may need to let it sit on the countertop for 15 or 20 minutes so that it will be easy for you to roll out. If the dough starts cracking, it's likely because it's too cold. Lightly flour your countertop and your rolling pin and start rolling from the center out, regularly checking to make sure your dough can always move around on your countertop without sticking. To know if you've rolled it out enough, invert the pie plate over the rolled out dough. If you have a good two inches beyond the rim of the plate, you're good to go.
- **Moving the dough to a pie plate** It sounds trickier than it is. I usually gently fold the dough in half and transfer it to a pie plate that way, but you can also roll the dough around the rolling pin and then unroll it onto the pie plate. Fit it into the plate.
- **Blind baking** Sometimes a recipe will tell you to prebake the pie crust before filling it. This is common with liquidy fillings such as custard or pumpkin, or if you cook the filling separately and you won't be putting the pie in the oven, like meringue. With the crust inside a pie plate, prick the crust all over the place with a fork. Place a piece of parchment paper on top of the crust and fill the parchment with pie weights or dried beans (the beans won't be edible after you bake them, though. Just keep them for the next pie. I've been using the same dried beans since college –swear!) This prevents the crust from puffing up.
- **Finishing** It doesn't have to be perfect. Do your best and have fun. I seal the top and bottom crusts together and use my thumbs and pointer fingers from both hands to pinch the dough. An easy thing to do is use the tines of a fork and press the crust all along the rim of the plate. Lastly I cut a couple slits in the center of the top crust so steam can escape and you won't have a watery pie. Glazing with an egg wash makes the pie look beautiful, but if egg is out of the question, you can use a little cream.

PIE CRUST RECIPE

Makes enough for a 9-inch double-crust pie

2 ½ cups all-purpose flour or white spelt flour

1 teaspoon cane sugar

1 teaspoon sea salt

2 sticks unsalted butter, cut into pieces

5-8 Tablespoons ice water

1. Place the flour, sugar and salt in the bowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade and pulse a couple times until blended.
2. Add the butter to the flour and pulse until the mixture resembles small peas.
3. Pour 5 Tablespoons of ice water on top of the flour mixture and pulse about 10 times. Avoiding the blade, carefully grab a small handful of dough and squeeze together. If the dough holds together without crumbling, it's ready to be formed into a disc. If it's too dry, pulse in another few teaspoons of ice water until dough holds together.
4. Transfer dough to a piece of parchment and bring dough together to form a ball. Divide in half and shape into two disks. Wrap each disk in parchment and refrigerate at least 30 minutes at which point it will be ready to roll out. Or you can keep the dough refrigerated for 2-3 days, or in the freezer, well wrapped for 2-3 months.