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All Strawberry Pie

Author's Notes: As I've said elsewhere, there are those who think that strawberries are, for the most part, unsuitable for pies because they bake up so soft. I say nonsense. Sure, they cook up soft, but so do many other fruits. Just because strawberries don't stay firm doesn't mean you should eliminate them from your pie repertoire. Like so many other fresh fruit pies, I tend to make this one only during local fresh berry season. I like to add some form of mint to the mix, since the two share harvest times and taste so good together. Minced fresh mint is fine, although it tends to turn a little dark in the baking, which may be somewhat unappealing if you're serving the pie to guests. Instead, you might consider a drop or two of mint oil, or, as I use here, white crème de menthe. Along with the nutmeg, it adds a soft flavor to the fruit that everyone seems to like.

Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Crust:

1 recipe **Basic Flaky Pie Pastry, Double Crust**, refrigerated (See recipe below).

Filling:

4 cups hulled and thickly sliced fresh strawberries
1/2 cup sugar
2 tablespoons cornstarch
1 tablespoon white crème de menthe (optional)
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 tablespoon cold, unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

Glaze:

Sugar
Milk or light cream

1. If you haven't already, prepare the pastry and refrigerate until firm enough to roll, about 1 hour.
2. On a sheet of lightly floured waxed paper, roll the larger portion of the pastry into a 12-inch circle with a floured rolling pin. Invert over a 9-inch standard pie pan, center, and peel off the paper. Gently tuck the pastry into the pan, without stretching it, and let the overhang drape over the edge. Place in the refrigerator for 15 minutes.



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All Strawberry Pie, (continued)

3. Put the strawberries in a large bowl. Mix the sugar and cornstarch together in a small bowl, then add the mixture to the fruit and toss well. Add the crème de menthe (if using), lemon juice, and nutmeg and toss again. Set aside for 10 minutes. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
4. On another sheet of lightly floured waxed paper roll the other half of the pastry into an 11-inch circle. Turn the filling into the chilled pie shell and smooth the fruit with a spoon. Dot the top with the butter. Lightly moisten the rim of the pie shell. Invert the top pastry over the filling, center, and peel off the paper. Press the top and bottom pastries together along the dampened edge. Trim the pastry with scissors or a paring knife. Put a couple of vents near the edge of the crust so you can check the juices there later. Sprinkle the top crust evenly with sugar then with milk.
5. Place the pie on the center oven rack and bake for 30 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 375°F and rotate the pie 180 degrees, so that the part that faced the back of the oven now faces forward. Just in case, slide a large aluminum foil-lined baking sheet onto the rack below to catch any drips. Bake until the juices bubble thickly at the steam vents and the top is golden brown, 35 to 45 minutes. If the top of the pie starts to get too dark, cover it with loosely tented aluminum foil during the last 10 to 15 minutes.
6. Transfer the pie to a wire rack and let cool for at least 2 hours to let the juices settle and firm up before serving.

Recipe for Success:

- This really is meant to be an all-strawberry pie, with the purity of flavor you hope for from such a pie. But if you just can't resist adding that handful of leftover raspberries or cherries you have hanging around, I'll understand.
- This also will work as a crumb-topped pie. Simply choose one of the crumb toppings in this collection, adding it halfway through the baking. (If you're uncertain how this is done, read a crumb-topped pie recipe before proceeding).
- If your strawberries are a little lackluster, add 2 tablespoons strawberry preserves to the filling to enhance the flavor.



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Basic Flaky Pie Pastry

Author's Notes: This pie pastry is used frequently throughout this collection because it yields such excellent result. I sometimes call it a half-and-half pastry, referring to the equal amounts of vegetable shortening and butter – the former for flakiness, the latter for flavor. It can be made in a food processor if you have a large-capacity machine. But I'll repeat my usual advice, which is to make it by hand or with an electric mixer if you don't. Both methods are quite easy. If you could have only one pastry to work with, this would probably be it.

Makes a single or double crust for a 9-inch standard pie or a 9-1/2-inch deep-dish pie.

For a Single Crust

1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1-1/2 teaspoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
1/4 cup cold vegetable shortening, cut into pieces
1/4 cup cold water

For a Double Crust

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
1/2 cup cold vegetable shortening, cut into pieces
1/2 cup cold water

Step 1. To Make in a Food Processor - Put the flour, sugar, and salt in the food processor. Pulse several times to mix. Scatter the butter over the dry ingredients and pulse the machine 5 or 6 times to cut it in. Fluff the mixture with a fork, lifting it up from the bottom of the bowl. Scatter the shortening over the flour and pulse 5 or 6 times. Fluff the mixture again. Drizzle half of the water over the flour mixture and pulse 5 or 6 times. Fluff the mixture and sprinkle on the remaining water. Pulse 5 or 6 times more, until the dough starts to form clumps. Overall, it will look like coarse crumbs. Dump the contents of the processor bowl into a large bowl. Test the pastry by squeezing some of it between your fingers. If it seems a little dry and not quite packable, drizzle a teaspoon or so of cold water over the pastry and work it in with your fingertips.



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Basic Flaky Pie Pastry, (continued)

Step 1. To Make by Hand - Combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Toss well, by hand, to mix. Scatter the butter over the dry ingredients and toss to mix. Using a pastry blender, 2 knives, or your fingertips, cut or rub the butter into the flour until it is broken into pieces the size of small peas. Add the shortening and continue to cut until all of the fat is cut into small pieces. Sprinkle half of the water over the mixture. Toss well with a fork to dampen the mixture. Add the remaining water, 1-1/2 to 2 tablespoon at a time, and continue to toss and mix, pulling the mixture up from the bottom of the bowl on the upstroke and gently pressing down on the downstroke. Dough made by hand often needs a bit more water. If necessary add water 1 or 2 teaspoons at a time until the pastry can be packed.

Step 1. To Make with an Electric Mixer - Combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Add the butter, tossing it with the flour. With the mixer on low speed, blend the butter into the flour until you have what looks like coarse, damp meal, with both large and small clumps. Add the shortening and repeat. Turning the mixer on and off, add half of the water. Mix briefly on low speed. Add the remaining water, mixing slowly until the dough starts to form large clumps. If you're using a stand mixer, stop periodically to stir the mixture up from the bottom of the bowl. Do not overmix.

Step 2. Using your hands, pack the pastry into a ball (or 2 balls if you are making a double crust) as you would pack a snowball. If you're making a double crust, make one ball slightly larger than the other; this will be your bottom crust. Knead each ball once or twice, then flatten the balls into 3/4-inch-thick disks on a floured work surface. Wrap the disks in plastic and refrigerate for at least an hour or overnight before rolling.