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Patsy's Mixed-Berry Freeform Pie

Author's Notes: Like my friend, Patsy Jamieson, food editor of *Eating Well* magazine, I love to mix berries in summer pies. Here she does just that in a freeform pie with a base of cheesecake-like custard, which Patsy says makes a creamy contrast to the berries. Instead of a traditional butter pastry this one uses Patsy's excellent cottage cheese pastry. In addition to the cottage cheese, it contains oil and baking powder, so the baked texture is more cake-like than crumbly, the way pastry typically is. It tastes delicious and makes a wonderful container for this special summer pie.

Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Crust:

1 recipe Patsy's Cottage Cheese Pastry, refrigerated

Filling:

4 ounces (half of an 8-ounce package) reduced-fat cream cheese (Neufchatel cheese), softened
1/4 cup sugar
1 teaspoon cornstarch
1 large egg yolk
2 teaspoons grated lemon zest
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 cups fresh mixed berries, such as blackberries, raspberries, and blueberries (picked over for stems)

Glaze:

1 large egg white
1 tablespoon water
2 tablespoons sugar

1. If you haven't already, prepare the pastry and refrigerate for 1 hour, as directed.
2. Line a large baking sheet with lightly oiled parchment paper or aluminum foil. Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Patsy's Mixed-Berry Freeform Pie, (continued)

3. Using an electric mixer, beat the cream cheese, sugar, and cornstarch together in a medium-size bowl until smooth. Blend in the egg yolk, lemon zest, and vanilla until smooth. Set aside.
4. On a sheet of lightly floured waxed paper, roll the pastry into a 14-inch circle. Invert the pastry over the lined baking sheet, center, and peel off the paper, letting the pastry drape slightly over the edges, if necessary. Without upsetting the overhanging dough, put the entire baking sheet in the refrigerator for 5 minutes to re-firm the pastry.
5. Remove the baking sheet and pastry from the refrigerator. Imagine a circle about 8 inches in diameter in the center of the pastry. Spread the cream cheese mixture over that area, leaving a wide border all around. Pile the berries evenly over the mixture. Using a metal spatula to help you lift it, fold the uncovered perimeter of pastry up and over the filling, enclosing it. The pastry will sort of self-pleat as you do this.
6. To make the glaze, whisk the egg white with the water in a small bowl. Brush the glaze lightly over the exposed portion of the pastry. Sprinkle the berries and pastry with the sugar.
7. Place the pie on the center oven rack and bake until the crust is deep golden brown, about 30 minutes. Transfer the baking sheet and pie to a wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes, then slide the pie, with the lining, onto the rack. Serve slightly warm or at room temperature.

Recipe for Success:

- Because of the baking powder, Patsy's pastry is a little more delicate than some, which is why I give it an intermediate rest in the fridge to help firm it up for more handling. If you have a small fridge or a rather full one and putting the pastry – on a large baking sheet – in it is impractical, you can use an alternative method. Start rolling the pastry on the waxed paper as directed, until it is 10 or 11 inches in diameter. Slide the dough and paper onto a small baking sheet or tray, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 10 minutes. Then proceed with the rolling and filling.

Patsy's Cottage Cheese Pastry

Author's Note: This is the pastry that my friend Patsy Jamieson uses for her freeform pies. As she says, it's pretty much foolproof and it's a cinch to make in a food processor. I recommend it for just about any *crostata*-like pie, but do note that it contains a fair amount of sugar and browns easily. Keep a close eye on it during the last few minutes of baking, and cover the pie with aluminum foil if it starts to get too dark.

Makes enough pastry for 1 large freeform pie.

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 teaspoons cold, unsalted butter cut into 1/4-inch pieces
3/4 cup lowfat cottage cheese
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 cup canola oil or other vegetable oil
2 tablespoons lowfat milk
1-1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. In a medium-size bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and salt. Whisk well to mix. Add the butter and blend with a pastry blender or rub between your fingers until the mixture is crumbly and the butter is broken into small bits.
2. Puree the cottage cheese in a food processor. Add the sugar, oil, milk, and vanilla. Process until smooth, stopping once or twice to scrape down the bowl. Add the dry mixture to the processor bowl and pulse several times, just until the dough clumps together. Do not overmix.
3. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead several times. Shape the dough into a ball, then flatten it into a thick disk. Sprinkle the dough with flour, then wrap in plastic. Refrigerate for a least 30 minutes or up to 3 hours before rolling.

Recipe for Success:

- Patsy is the food editor of *Eating Well* magazine, which specializes in healthy, lowfat cooking. Thus, she uses lowfat dairy products for this dough. I've also used full-fat products, which work equally well.