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Vid and Annie's Fresh Raspberry Crumb Pie

Author's Notes: Here's a pie I like to make two or three times a summer. When my New Hampshire friends, Vid and Annie Caldmanis, would give me boxes of fresh raspberries from their garden, I would quickly turn around and bake those fragile fruits into pies like this, lest they slide past their prime. So I dedicate this pie to Vid and Annie, for all the great berries they generously bestowed on me.

Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Crust:

1 recipe Basic Flaky Pie Pastry, refrigerated

Filling:

4 cups fresh raspberries
1/2 cup plus 3 tablespoons sugar
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1-1/2 tablespoons cornstarch
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 to 3 tablespoons seedless raspberry jam (optional)

Crumb Topping:

1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/4-inch pieces

Garnish:

Vanilla, peach, or strawberry ice 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 pastry into a 12-inch circle with a floured rolling pin. Invert the pastry over a 9-inch standard pie pan, center, and peel off the paper. Tuck the pastry into the pan, without stretching it, and sculpt the edge into an upstanding ridge. Place in the freezer for 15 minutes. Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Vid and Annie's Fresh Raspberry Crumb Pie, (continued)

3. Combine the raspberries, 1/2 cup of the sugar, and the lemon juice in a large bowl. Toss gently to mix, then set aside for 10 minutes to juice. Meanwhile, combine the remaining 3 tablespoons sugar and the cornstarch and nutmeg in a small bowl. Stir the mixture into the fruit.
4. Spread the raspberry jam, if using, inside the chilled pie shell. Scrape the filling into the shell, smoothing the fruit with a spoon. Place the pie on the center oven rack and bake for 25 minutes.
5. Meanwhile, make the topping. Combine the flour, sugar, cinnamon, and salt in a food processor. Scatter the butter over the dry mixture and pulse until the mixture resembles fine crumbs. Dump the crumbs into a large bowl and gently rub between your fingers to make large, buttery crumbs. Refrigerate until ready to use.
6. Remove the pie from the oven and reduce the oven temperature to 375°F. Carefully dump the crumbs in the center of the pie and spread them evenly over the top with your hands. Return the pie to the oven, placing it 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 spills. Continue to bake until the juices bubble thickly around the edge of the pie, about 25 minutes.
7. Transfer the pie to a wire rack and let cool. Serve barely warm or at room temperature, accompanied by ice cream.

Recipe for Success:

- Due to their fragile nature, raspberries are quite prone to mold. For that reason, I always give them the sniff test before purchasing. If I detect any trace of mold, which is often very difficult to see, I pass. Even the smallest amount of mold will taint the flavor of a pie.
- Juicy berry pies like this one are sometimes tricky to team up with a crumb topping, as the topping has a tendency to absorb excess juice. If I see a lot of juice in a filling when I'm ready to add the topping I sprinkle several tablespoons of rolled oats (quick-cooking works best) over the pie and return it to the oven for about 5 minutes. The oats absorb the juice and form something of a barrier. I then add the topping and proceed as usual. It works pretty well.

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.

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 tablespoons 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.