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Caramel Apple Hand Pies

Makes 6-8 Hand Pies

Ingredients:

Cream Cheese Crust

Ingredients:

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon sugar
1-1/4 teaspoon Kosher salt
8 oz. (1 pkg) cream cheese
1 cup unsalted butter (2 sticks), well chilled
1 egg white, beaten

Apple Filling

Ingredients:

2 cups apples, diced and peeled
(2-3 large apples)
3 tablespoons sugar
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1 tablespoon cornstarch

Dark Caramel Sauce

Ingredients:

Makes 1-1/2 cups

1-1/2 cup granulated white sugar
1/4 cup water
1 cup heavy cream
1/4 teaspoon Kosher salt
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch dice
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

Garnish:

3 tablespoons sugar
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

Directions:

The crust may be mixed by hand or with a food processor. Choose your preferred method, then continue assembling the hand pies.

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Mixing by Hand:

- 1a. MIX the flour, sugar, and salt together in a large bowl with a whisk until evenly distributed.
- 2a. CUT the butter and cream cheese into 1/2-inch cubes. Use a little of the flour mixture to keep the pieces from sticking together. CHILL the cubes for 15 minutes.
- 3a. PLACE the butter and cream cheese cubes in the flour mixture. Using a simple pastry blender, cut the butter, cream cheese, and flour mixture together until a coarse texture is reached with some pea-sized pieces of butter and/or cream cheese remaining.
- 4a. FORM the rough dough into a ball using your hands and a light touch.
- 5a. FLATTEN the dough ball into a disk about a half-inch thick, and wrap in plastic wrap. CHILL the wrapped dough disk for an hour or overnight.

Mixing with a Food Processor:

- 1b. PLACE the flour, sugar, and salt in the bowl of the food processor. PULSE a few times to evenly distribute the sugar and salt.
- 2b. CUT the butter and cream cheese into 1/2-inch cubes. Use a little of the flour mixture to keep the pieces from sticking together. CHILL the cut butter and cream cheese cubes for 15 minutes.
- 3b. PLACE the butter and cream cheese cubes in the food processor with the flour mixture. PULSE 6-8 times to cut the butter and cream cheese into the flour. The dough mixture will be coarse with some pea-sized pieces of butter and cream cheese remaining. (Resist the urge to keep pulsing.)
- 4a. REMOVE the rough dough from the work bowl and form into a ball using your hands and a light touch.
- 5b. FLATTEN the dough ball into a disk about a half-inch thick, and wrap in plastic wrap. CHILL the wrapped dough disk for an hour or overnight.

Making the Caramel Sauce:

1. WARM the cream in a microwave for 1 minute, or in a small saucepan until quite warm, but not boiling.
2. COMBINE in a medium saucepan the white sugar and water. APPLY heat gradually, first on low heat until the sugar has completely dissolved, then increase the heat to medium. ALLOW the mixture to boil gently until it begins to change color. Use a pastry brush dipped in water to lightly wash down the sides of the pan removing any crystals that might form at the edge of the bubbling liquid. Once the color change starts, watch very carefully; when it turns a medium amber color, remove from heat. (If it becomes too dark, it will take on a burnt flavor – start over).

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3. ADD the warm cream to the hot sugar syrup; it will bubble profusely for a few seconds. RETURN the pan to heat, add the salt, and cubed butter. Stir gently until the butter has completely melted and become well-incorporated into the mixture.
4. BOIL the developing caramel, without stirring, until it reaches the soft-ball stage, 240°F on a candy thermometer. REMOVE from heat and allow the caramel to cool slowly and completely.

Forming the Hand Pies:

1. REMOVE the dough from the refrigerator when ready to bake the hand pies and let set for 10 minutes on the countertop so it becomes slightly more pliable.
2. ROLL the dough on a lightly floured surface to a 1/8- to 3/16-inch thickness.
3. CUT circles from the dough (5-inch circles for 6 pies; 4-inch circles for 8 pies). TRANSFER half of the circles to a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
4. BEAT the egg white with 2 teaspoons of water, and BRUSH the egg white wash lightly on the perimeter of each bottom circle.
5. PEEL, slice and dice the apples for the filling. (A fine dice or coarse chop will allow more apples to fit into each pie.)
6. SPRINKLE the sugar, cinnamon, and cornstarch over the diced apples. Gently toss the fruit to distribute the cornstarch/sugar mixture.
7. SPOON a couple tablespoons of the apple filling into the center of one bottom circle mounding them slightly. TOP with a teaspoon or two of the caramel sauce. (Warm the sauce, if needed, for easy drizzling.) Leave about 1/2-inch of the crust clear for sealing.
8. STRETCH the top circle slightly to fit over the mounded apples. MATCH the edges of the top crust with the bottom crust pressing them together. CRIMP the edges with fork tines. Repeat with the remaining hand pies. (By working individually, the filling has less time to flood the bottom crust with running juices that would otherwise challenge a good seal of the top and bottom crusts.)
9. BRUSH the tops of the formed hand pies with the egg white wash. SPRINKLE lightly with a cinnamon-sugar mixture (3 tablespoons sugar and 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon). VENT the pies by cutting small slits on the top with the tip of a paring knife in a decorative design of your choosing. (We like a simple star with five small cuts placed in a radiating pattern that mimics the cross-cut of an apple.)
10. BAKE the hand pies in a 400° oven for 15-20 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown.
11. TRANSFER the hand pies to serving plates. DRIZZLE thin ribbons of additional caramel sauce over the cooled hand pies. SERVE and swoon.