

GOAT'S CHEESE AND LEMON TART



I love the way fresh goat's cheese gives this tart a gentle tang – it's very subtle, but definitely there, and combines beautifully with the lemon. It just so happened it was springtime when we photographed this, and my garden was full of edible flowers, so I couldn't resist using them to finish off the tart; however, it looks wonderful decorated with a mixture of fresh berries too.

SERVES 8

INGREDIENTS

1 Pre-baked good, Simple Shortcrust Tart Shell (made in a shallow 24 cm tart tin), recipe follows

Filling:

150 g fresh, soft goat's cheese (I often use Udder Delights chevre)

3/4 cup (165 g) castor sugar

1 teaspoon cornflour

2 eggs

1 egg yolk

200 g crème fraîche or sour cream

finely grated zest of 1 large lemon

2 tablespoons lemon juice, strained

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

icing sugar, for dusting

unsprayed edible flowers or mixed berries, to garnish

softly whipped cream or ice-cream (optional), to serve

METHOD

- Preheat your oven to 180°C. Sit the tart tin with the shell on a baking tray and set it aside.
- Put the goat's cheese, castor sugar, cornflour, eggs, egg yolk, crème fraîche or sour cream, lemon zest, lemon juice and vanilla in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Whiz them together, stopping and scraping down the sides once or twice, until the mixture is smooth.
- the tart for about 25 minutes or until the filling has just set. To check, press your fingertips gently on the surface – it should be a little wobbly, but firm. Transfer it to a wire rack and leave it to cool completely. By the way, this step can be done 4–5 hours ahead of time, and the tart can be kept in a cool spot (not the fridge) until you're ready to serve it.

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- Pour the mixture into the prepared tart shell, then carefully transfer the tray with the tin to the oven. Bake
- Gently slip the tart out of its tin onto a serving plate and dust it with icing sugar, then scatter flowers or berries over the top. Serve with whipped cream or ice-cream, or enjoy it just as it is.

A GOOD, SIMPLE SHORTCRUST PASTRY TART SHELL

This is the pastry recipe that I use all the time - it makes terrific pastry that's short and buttery without being too difficult to handle. In fact, over the years I've noticed that many of my students who have sworn off ever making pastry, have actually become remarkably adept once they used this recipe, so even if you feel a little nervous about making it, please give it a go, it really does work well.

As I write it, I've been racking my brains about what the most important tips are that I can pass on to you. And one in particular that keeps surfacing is just what a difference it makes when you get a handle on when pastry is at the right stage for rolling. It's not hard to pick this up, however you may have to make it a few times before you feel entirely comfortable with it. Basically, if the pastry seems too soft to roll, chill it a bit longer; if it's hard and cracks around the edges as you begin to flatten it, then let it soften a bit more. The temperature of the room where you're rolling the pastry also makes a difference; pastry is always much easier to handle when the weather is cooler, as it softens rapidly in warm weather. However, having said that, I live in a near-tropical climate and still make it - so there is hope! I tend to roll it early in the morning before the temperature soars, and also try to work quite quickly when I'm rolling it to prevent it becoming too warm and soft.

Makes one 26-28cm round tart shell or one 30 x 21cm rectangular tart shell

1 ½ cups (225g) plain flour

¼ teaspoon salt

125g cold unsalted cultured butter, cut into small chunks

¼ cup (60ml) iced water

1 egg yolk mixed with 2 teaspoons cold water, for glazing

- Whiz the flour and salt together in a food processor. Add the butter and whiz everything again until the mixture resembles medium-fine breadcrumbs. With the motor running, pour in the iced water and process only until the dough forms a ball around the blade. (The time for this varies a bit depending on the weather, when it's warm it comes together faster.)
- Tip the dough out onto a board and shape it into a ball. Now, flatten it into a disc, and wrap it tightly in plastic film. Chill the disc in the fridge for about 40 minutes, or until the pastry is firm but supple enough to roll out. By the way, if you want to make the pastry ahead of time, it keeps well in the fridge for up to 3 days, but it will be too firm to roll at this stage, so let it warm up at room temperature until it's pliable. (You can also make the pastry a few weeks ahead and freeze it, then just defrost it in the fridge overnight.)

THE SHELL - GOAT'S CHEESE AND LEMON TART

- On a lightly floured board, roll out the pastry into a large round to fit a 26-28cm loose-based tart tin (or use a 30 – 21cm rectangular tin as I did). Roll the pastry around your rolling pin to transfer it to the tin. Then gently drape it over the tin, being careful that you don't press it down onto the sharp edges which may cut through it.
- Use your knuckles to gently press the pastry into the tin, leaving an overhang all around. Trim a little pastry from the overhang and keep it in the fridge in case you need to patch any cracks later on. Sit the tin on a baking tray - this makes it much easier to manoeuvre both now and later when the tart is baking - and chill it for 40 minutes or so, until the pastry is firm.
- Preheat your oven to 200C.
- Completely cover the pastry with a large sheet of foil, pressing it gently down into the corners. Spread pie weights, uncooked rice or dried beans all over the base to a depth of about one centimetre to weigh it down.
- Slide the baking tray into the oven and bake the tart shell for 20 minutes, or until it's nearly set. Remove it from the oven and run a rolling pin over the foil on the top edge to cut off the pastry overhang. Return the tin to oven, with the foil and weights still intact, and bake the pastry for a further 10 minutes, or until it's lightly coloured and feels firm and dry. Take it out again and carefully remove the foil and weights. Don't worry if there are any fine cracks in the pastry shell, just patch them with the reserved pastry.
- Brush the egg yolk mixture over the pastry, making sure it is well coated, then return the tart shell to oven for a few minutes so the egg wash sets to a shiny glaze (this helps seal the pastry and stop the bottom getting soggy once it's filled.) When it's set, remove the tart shell from the oven and leave it to cool in the tin on a rack; it's then ready to be filled.
- If you're wondering what the egg wash does, it's to help seal the pastry by filling in any hairline cracks, and forming a lacquer-like layer between the crust and filling; this in turn helps prevent the filling leaking into the base and making it soggy.

Note

If you would rather higher sides and a fluted rim to your tart, you need to do things a little differently. Once you've lined the tin with pastry, trim off the excess with a sharp knife but leave a 2cm border all the way around. Turn this border inwards, slightly over on itself and then pinch it so it sits up higher than the rim of the tin. If you like, flute the edge by pinching it gently between your thumb and forefinger.

To bake it blind, line the tin as above with the foil and pie weights, but leave them intact for the full 30 minutes cooking time. Then just continue with the glaze.

