



## Be happy, bake pie

• FAYE LEVY and YAKIR LEVY  
Photos by ANDREW SCRIVANI

**K**ate McDermott, author of *Art of the Pie – A Practical Guide to Homemade Crusts, Fillings, and Life*, is passionate about teaching how to make delicious pies, and about sharing the life lessons she learned from pie making.

“In pie making it’s important not to overthink the process and sweat the little stuff,” she wrote. “When I make pie dough, it is a reminder for me to keep things simple in my life as well.”

“Pie has taught me how to give up the quest for perfection,” wrote McDermott. “...What about the doughs I make that don’t look like the ones on the covers of magazines...? Have I failed...? What I have come to realize is that, like life, nothing is the same twice, and rarely is it perfect. I have found ways to ‘fix’ a dough that is falling apart... I realized that perfection is not the goal. Finding beauty and peace through the process is the goal.”

McDermott has developed three simple rules for pie making.

### Rule No. 1: Keep everything chilled, especially yourself

“Chill your dough, the flour, the fats, your pastry cloth, the bowl you make your dough in, even the work bowl and blade of your food processor, if you’re not doing it by hand...”

“The most important chill of all: Yourself!... Work dough and life lightly, just enough for it to come together, so you can roll along.”

### Rule No. 2: Keep your boundaries

“If pie dough droops over the edge of the pie pan, it may melt and burn on the sides.... After trimming the bottom and top dough [in a double-crust pie] to about a centimeter (a half inch) beyond the rim of the pan, I give them a quick fold toward the center, to make a little reservoir that will keep all the juices of the fruit filling safely inside the pan.”

In life, too, wrote McDermott, paying attention to boundaries is important. For example: “Do I have enough energy to help another, or do I need to give more care to myself?”

### Rule No. 3: Vent

When making a double-crust pie, such as apple pie or pear pie (see recipes), “you don’t want the filling... to erupt like Mount Vesuvius in places where the dough is weak or patched. So cut a few vents on the top of the pie to let the steam out.”

Similarly, McDermott found that there are times in life when “it is okay to vent, if done in an appropriate and constructive manner.”

### Pie-making techniques • Rolling the dough

McDermott spreads a pastry cloth on her work surface so the dough won’t stick, but instead you can use a clean dish towel, a cotton tablecloth or a pillowcase. She flours the cloth with cold flour that she keeps in her freezer.

“When rolling out dough... make sure that each stroke of the rolling pin begins in the center of the dough disc but stops about 2.5 centimeters (one inch) from the edge. Rolling all the way to, or even over, the edge of the dough” can make the edge too thin, “causing it to possibly crack and fall apart.”

After rolling the dough from the center to the far edge, then, from the center toward yourself, turn the dough 90 degrees and roll again. Roll the dough until it is 2.5 cm. to 5 cm. (1 to 2 inches) larger than the size of the pan.

Don’t worry if you don’t get an exact circle. “I rarely, if ever, roll out dough that is perfectly round,” wrote McDermott.

### • Transferring the dough to the pie pan

“Place the rolling pin in the center of the dough so that the long side of the pin faces one corner of the pastry cloth.... Place your left palm under the pastry cloth.... Place your right palm and fingers lightly on top of the dough and move both hands together as you lift and drape the pastry cloth over the pin so that the two edges of the cloth meet. Pull your hands away and fold back the cloth” so that your dough is resting on, and is folded over, the rolling pin.

Gently sweep any extra flour off the dough with a pastry brush. Then carefully lift the rolling pin a bit to brush any extra flour off the back side of the dough. Gently place the dough-draped pin across the center of the pie pan, and roll the pin across to the side of the pan. Adjust so the dough is more or less centered. Let it ease down into the pan from its natural weight.

This season is an ideal time to bake pie. The weather has not yet become too hot to enjoy baking, and Passover is around the corner. Many people want to use up their flour before the holiday. What better way than to make a pie, or two, or three? ■

*Faye Levy is the author of Fresh from France: Dessert Sensations.*



### All-butter pie dough

An all-butter crust is not as flaky as one made also with shortening, wrote Kate McDermott, “but the flavor can’t be beat.”

*Makes 1 double-crust or 2 single-crust pies*

- 2½ cups (363 gr. or 12.8 oz.) all purpose flour, unbleached
- ¼ tsp. (3 gr. or 0.1 oz.) salt
- 14 Tbsp. (196 gr. or 6.9 oz.) salted or unsalted butter, cut into tablespoon-size pieces
- ½ cup (118 gr. or 4.2 oz.) ice water + 1-2 Tbsp. more, as needed

Put all ingredients but the ice water in a large bowl.

With clean hands, quickly squash mixture together, or use a pastry blender with an up-and-down motion, until ingredients look like cracker crumbs with lumps the size of peas and almonds. These lumps will make your crust flaky.

Sprinkle ice water over mixture and stir lightly with a fork. Squeeze a handful of dough to see if it holds together. Mix in more water as needed.

Divide dough in half and make 2 chubby discs about 12 cm. (5 in.) across. Wrap discs separately in plastic wrap and chill for about 1 hour, or up to overnight. It may turn a pale gray when chilled overnight, but will be fine to use.

To store dough for longer, double-wrap each disc in plastic, date them and freeze in a sealable freezer bag. Thaw in the refrigerator overnight or on the counter for an hour or so.

### The quintessential apple pie

“I don’t peel apples,” wrote McDermott, “as most skins become soft in the baking, plus their tannins add flavor to the pie”; but you can peel the apples if their skins are too thick.

To get a pie with exceptional flavor and texture, McDermott recommends a mix of six to eight different apple va-

rieties, some for a tart flavor, some that hold their shape, and some that don’t. McDermott prefers heirloom apple varieties. She also makes an apple quince pie with this recipe, using 8 cups of sliced apples and 1 quince, which she cuts smaller than the apples.

*Makes one 23-cm. (9-in.) deep-dish pie*

- 1 recipe double-crust pie dough (see recipe above)
- About 10 cups apples (skin on), quartered and cored, to mound up high in the pie pan
- ½ cup (100 gr. or 3½ oz.) sugar
- ½ tsp. (3 gr. or 0.1 oz.) salt
- 1 tsp. (2 gr. or 0.07 oz.) cinnamon
- 2 gratings nutmeg
- ½ tsp. (1 gr. or 0.04 oz.) allspice
- 1 Tbsp. (12 gr. or 0.4 oz.) artisan apple cider vinegar or 1 to 2 tsp. (5-10 gr. or 0.17-0.35 oz.) freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1-2 Tbsp. (15-30 gr. or 0.5-1 oz.) calvados or other apple liqueur (optional but really good)
- ½ cup (73 gr. or 2.6 oz.) flour
- 1 knob butter, the size of a small walnut, cut in small pieces (for dotting top of filling)
- 1-2 tsp. (4-8 gr. or 0.15-0.3 oz.) sugar (for sprinkling)
- 1 egg white plus 1 Tbsp. (15 gr. or 0.5 oz.) water, fork beaten (egg wash)

Roll out one piece of the dough and place it in a pie pan.

Slice apples 1.5 centimeters (½ inch) thick, or chunk them up into pieces you can comfortably get into your mouth.

In a large mixing bowl, put apples, sugar, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, vinegar, calvados and flour. Mix lightly until most of surfaces are covered with what looks like wet sand.

Pour mixture into unbaked pie crust, mounding high, and dot with the bits of butter.

Roll out remaining dough, lay it over

filling, and cut 5 to 6 vents on top. Trim excess dough from edges, leaving about a centimeter (a half inch) of dough extending beyond the rim of the pan, and crimp it: Fold the top crust over and use a fork to crimp and seal in the filling.

Cover pie and refrigerate while you preheat oven to 220°C (425°F).

Lightly brush some of egg wash over entire pie, including the edges. Bake on middle rack of oven for 20 minutes.

Reduce heat to 190°C (375°F) and bake for 30 minutes longer. Open oven and carefully sprinkle sugar evenly on top of pie, then continue baking for 10 minutes more.

Look for steam and a slight bit of juice coming out of the vents before removing pie from oven. Get your ear right down almost to the top of the pie and listen for the “sizzle-whump”—the crust makes a sizzling sound and the bubbling filling will hit the inside of the upper crust making a whumping noise.

Cool pie for at least an hour before eating.

### Pear pie

As with apple pies, McDermott leaves her pears unpeeled and mounds them high in the pie shell. You can use any combination of pears to make it.

*Makes one 23-cm. (9-in.) deep-dish pie*

- 1 recipe double-crust pie dough (see recipe above)
- 7-8 pears (skin on), quartered and cored
- ½ cup (73 gr. or 2.6 oz.) flour
- ½ cup (100 gr. or 3½ oz.) sugar
- ½ tsp. (3 gr. or 0.1 oz.) salt
- 1 tsp. (2 gr. or 0.07 oz.) cinnamon
- 2 gratings nutmeg
- ½ tsp. (1 gr. or 0.04 oz.) allspice
- 1 Tbsp. (15 gr. or 0.5 oz.) pear vinegar or artisan apple cider vinegar
- 1-2 Tbsp. (15-30 gr. or 0.5-1 oz.) pear brandy (optional)
- 2 tsp. (9 gr. or 0.3 oz.) butter,

chopped into little pieces

- 1-2 tsp. (4-8 gr. or 0.15-0.3 oz.) sugar (for sprinkling)
- 1 egg white mixed with 1 Tbsp. (15 gr. or 0.5 oz.) water (egg wash)

Follow instructions in recipe “The quintessential apple pie” (above).

### Shaker lemon pie

“If bright lemon marmalade makes your mouth sing,” wrote McDermott, “this pie is for you.... The whole lemon, rind and all, is sliced very finely and used.” McDermott recommends serving this pie with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or with homemade crème fraîche.

*Makes one 23-cm. (9-in.) deep-dish pie or four 12.7-cm. (5-in.) mini pies*

- 1 recipe single-crust pie dough (see recipe above)
- 2 or 3 thin-skinned lemons
- 2 cups (400 gr. or 14 oz.) sugar
- 4 eggs, beaten well with fork
- Tiny pinch of salt

Prepare pie dough and refrigerate.

Slice lemons as thin as possible – the thinner the better. This is a good time to use a mandolin. If you prefer smaller pieces, chop the thin slices finely with a knife.

Place lemon slices and their juices in a bowl with sugar. Mix with a spoon and refrigerate at least 6 hours or overnight in refrigerator.

Preheat oven to 230°C (450°F). Remove lemon-sugar mixture from refrigerator. Add beaten eggs and salt, and mix well.

Roll out dough and place it in a pie pan. Pour in the filling. Bake for 15 minutes.

Reduce heat to 190°C (375°F) and bake for about 25 minutes more, but check it at 20 minutes. The pie is done when a knife that is inserted in the filling comes out clean. Cool to room temperature before serving.