

Elegant and Easy Christmas Pies

Pies are such perennial favorites—especially during the holiday season. Make Christmas entertaining elegant and easy when you try this trio of fresh fruit pies. Think of them as quick alternatives to the traditional fruitcakes, with the added goodness of fruits like apples, bananas, cranberries and oranges.

What makes these luscious desserts so company-appealing and so easy to prepare are "convenience" products like gelatin, pudding and frozen whipped topping. When combined with the best of the season's fruits, the results are tasty, time-saving and terrific!

Creamy pudding and velvety whipped topping are the building blocks that make these desserts possible and make them so quick to prepare. With gifts to buy, trees to trim, cards to write and family and friends to visit, the last thing you need to bother with this month is fussing in the kitchen. These desserts just look like they took days of cooking but the preparation is quick and simple.

To make your holidays a little easier, here are some tips on preparing pudding (cooked and instant) to speed you along.

- There are two kinds of packaged pudding—pudding and pie filling, which requires cooking, or instant pudding and pie filling, which needs no cooking. Both work beautifully, but each works in different ways, with different preparation directions. These two types are not interchangeable in recipes, so avoid confusion by making sure beforehand that you are using the specified one.
- When you cook pudding, stir the mixture as it cooks and be sure it comes to a full boil. It's best to use an aluminum or stainless steel pan which heats evenly, without hot spots.
- If you're in a hurry to prepare plain cooked pudding, try the microwave way. It is so convenient and can be used for all but the lemon flavor. Combine pudding mix and milk in 1-1/2 quart nonmetal bowl and blend well. Place in microwave oven and cook 3 minutes. Stir with rubber spatula or wooden spoon and continue to cook 1 minute longer, until mixture comes to a boil. Remove from oven and chill.
- If you're looking for a quicker instant pudding and pie filling preparation, try the blender method. Put milk and pudding mix in container and blend at high speed for fifteen seconds. Or how about the shaker method as another quick instant pudding preparation? Use a one-quart leakproof container, cover tightly and shake vigorously for at least forty-five seconds.
- With instant pudding and pie filling, always start with cold milk—it makes for better consistency in the finished recipe. Beat slowly, not vigorously, then pour pudding into serving dishes or pie crust immediately, unless the recipe calls for setting first and then adding other ingredients.
- If you're counting calories, you can use skim milk or reconstituted nonfat dry milk instead of whole milk. The pudding will be less rich, but lower in calories.

You'll follow the basic package or recipe directions, of course, for making gelatin, but these extra tips will help as well.

- To make a mixture that is clear and uniformly set, be sure the gelatin is completely dissolved in the boiling water or other liquid before adding the cold liquid.
- To make gelatin in a microwave oven, measure 1 cup water into a glass bowl. Place in oven and heat about 2 minutes, or until water comes to a boil. Remove from oven, add gelatin (3 oz. package) and stir until dissolved. Add 1 cup cold water and chill until set.
- To store prepared gelatin overnight or longer, cover it to prevent drying. Always store gelatin cakes or pies in the refrigerator.

Happy Holidays!



Top—Raspberry-Orange Cream Cheese Pie Center-Right—Apple-Cranberry Pie Bottom Left—Fluffy Banana Tarts

Apple-Cranberry Pie

- 3 medium apples, peeled, cored and sliced (3 cups)
- 1-1/2 cups raw cranberries
- 1-1/2 cups water
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 package (3 oz.) raspberry or peach flavor gelatin
- 1 package (4-serving size) vanilla flavor pudding and pie filling
- 1 baked 9-inch pie shell, cooled

Combine apples, cranberries, water and sugar in saucepan. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Stir in gelatin; add pie filling mix and blend well. Bring again to a full boil over high heat. Remove from heat. Let stand about 5 minutes; then pour into pie shell. Chill until set, about 4 hours. Garnish with pastry cutouts and whipped topping, if desired.

To make pastry cutouts, roll trimmings from pie shell pastry very thin on floured board. Cut with cookie cutter. For more pastry cutouts, use additional pie crust mix. Bake on ungreased baking sheet at 425° for about 8 minutes. Cool.

Fluffy Banana Tarts

- 1 package (4-serving size) pistachio flavor instant pudding and pie filling
- 1 cup cold milk
- 1 container (4 oz.) frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 1/2 package (9 squares) sweet cooking chocolate
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 2 medium bananas, sliced
- 8 baked Cookie Tart Shells, cooled*

*Or use 8 commercial pastry shells in aluminum foil cups.

Prepare pudding mix as directed on package for pudding, reducing milk to 1 cup. Blend in whipped topping. Chill.

Shortly before serving, melt chocolate and butter in saucepan over very low heat, stirring constantly; cool. Dip 8 banana slices in chocolate to cover halfway. Chill until chocolate is firm. Place remaining banana slices in Cookie Tart Shells and drizzle with remaining chocolate. Spoon pudding mixture into tart shells. Garnish with chocolate-dipped banana slices and maraschino cherries, if desired, and serve at once. Makes 8 tarts.

Cookie Tart Shells. Combine 1/4 cup butter or margarine, softened and 1/3 cup sugar in small mixer bowl and beat until smooth and creamy. Add 2 egg whites, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Blend in 1/3 cup all-purpose flour, 1/4 cup ground almonds and 1/8 teaspoon almond extract. Grease bottoms of several glasses, using 2 tablespoons butter for each and spreading to make 6-inch rounds. Bake at 350° for 7 to 8 minutes, or until edges are lightly browned. Quickly place each cookie over a glass and press toward glass to make a fluted edge. Cool; then turn right side up and carefully remove from glass. Makes 8 shells.

Note: Shells are very delicate and break easily.

Raspberry-Orange Cream Cheese Pie

- 1 package (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 cup (1/2 pt.) sour cream
- 1 tablespoon grated orange rind
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 container (8 oz.) frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 1 baked (9-inch) graham cracker crumb crust, cooled
- 1 cup orange sections
- 1/4 cup raspberry jam

Beat cheese until smooth; gradually beat in sugar. Blend in sour cream, orange rind and vanilla. Fold in whipped topping, blending well. Spoon into crust. Chill until set, at least 4 hours. Arrange orange sections in circle on chilled filling. Strain jam to remove seeds; spoon over oranges and in center of pie.