

Bake this streusel pie

February is "Great American Pie Month" and, surely, a truly great pie has sound nutrition as well as terrific flavor. By that standard, fruit pies can have greater nutritional value than other types.

In recent years, health conscious cooks have found a variety of ways to make fruit pies more wholesome than traditional versions that are typically high in sweeteners and fat.

Although the filling is the usual source of excess calories from sugar, the fat in most fruit pies is found in the crust. A basic piecrust is made with one part butter or shortening to three parts flour, with just enough water to bind the ingredients. That results in a crust with 60 percent of its calories from fat.

Two types of reduced-fat alternatives to a traditional crust are the graham cracker crust and a meringue shell. A graham cracker crust requires less fat, and a meringue shell requires none.

Prepare a meringue pie shell by beating 3 large egg whites with 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar and a dash of salt. Gradually add 3/4 cup sugar and beat until stiff peaks form. Add 1/2 teaspoon vanilla and beat well. Spread the meringue over the bottom and sides of a 9-inch pie pan that has first been coated with cooking oil spray and then lightly dusted with flour. Bake for one hour at 275° F, turn the oven off and let the shell remain in the oven with the door closed for one hour or overnight.

Commercially prepared fruit fillings are usually high in sweeteners and calories. It only takes a few minutes to prepare a fruit filling from scratch, which allows the cook to add just enough sweetening to satisfy individual tastes and limit the calorie count.

APPLE STREUSEL PIE

- Filling**
- 5 cups peeled apples, thinly sliced
 - 2 teaspoons lemon juice
 - 1/4-1/3 cup sugar
 - 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
 - 1 teaspoon grated lemon rind
 - 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 - 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
 - 1 unskinned 9-inch pie shell
- Topping**
- 1/4-1/3 cup packed brown sugar
 - 3 tablespoons rolled oats (not quick or instant types)
 - 3 tablespoons whole wheat flour



Streusel pie: Health-conscious cooks have found ways to make fruit pies more wholesome than traditional versions. Combine apples with sugar, lemon rind, flour and spices.

- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 - 1 tablespoon soft margarine
- Preheat oven to 375° F.

To prevent apple slices from darkening, toss with lemon juice as soon as they are cut.

Combine sugar with lemon rind, flour and spices. Sprinkle over apples and stir until apples are well coated.

Prepare topping by combining brown sugar, oats, flour and cinnamon in a bowl. With a fork and knife, cut in margarine until mixture is crumbly.

Spoon apple filling into prepared pie shell. Sprinkle topping over filling.

Bake about 60 minutes or until top is golden and apples are tender.

Remove and cool on wire rack. Pie may be eaten while still warm or stored in refrigerator until ready to serve.

* Bring chilled pie to room temperature before serving.

Nutritional Information: Makes 8 servings, each containing about 211 calories and 7 grams of fat.

Recipe courtesy of the American Institute for Cancer Research.

Here comes Lent and seafood

See related column by Ken Abramczyk on Taste front.

Enjoy a little variety with fresh fish and shellfish this Lenten season.

Shrimp is such a wonderful seafood, and a good fish stock flavors this Shrimp Creole. Chef Paul Prudhomme says the shrimp fat from shrimp heads is an important component of Shrimp Creole, along with chicken fat or pork fat, but we've removed it here. Without it, the creole still tastes delicious.

Make a shrimp stock a day early using the shrimp shells and heads, if desired.

Also included are recipes for monkfish and flounder you may want to try.

SHRIMP CREOLE

- 2 pounds large shrimp, reserve shells
- 2 1/2 cups basic shrimp stock (see below)
- 2 1/2 cups finely chopped onions
- 1 3/4 finely chopped celery
- 1 1/2 cups finely chopped green bell peppers
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons white pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground red pepper (preferably cayenne)
- 3/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Tabasco sauce
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme leaves
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried sweet basil leaves
- 3 cups finely chopped peeled tomatoes
- 1 1/2 cups canned tomato sauce
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 5 cups rice

Rinse and peel shrimp. Use shells to make basic stock.

For one quart of stock, combine 2 quarts cold water, one quartered onion, one quartered garlic clove and one rib of celery. If you'd like you can roast vegetables first at 350° until browned. Bring to a boil, then simmer. Simmer gently for at least four hours, and as long as eight. Add water to keep one quart of liquid in the pot. Chill pot quickly in an sink full of ice water.

In a separate pan, mix one cup of onions with 1/4 cup butter and cook over high heat for 3 minutes. Lower to medium low and cook onions for another 3 to 5 minutes. Add remaining 1 1/2 cups onions, celery, bell peppers and butter. Cook over high heat until the bell peppers and celery start to get tender, about five minutes

stirring occasionally.

Add garlic, bay leaf, salt and peppers, stir well.

Add Tabasco, thyme, basil and 1/2 cup stock. Cook over medium heat about five minutes to allow vegetables to brown. Stir occasionally and scrape bottom of pan well. Add tomatoes, turn heat to low and simmer 10 minutes.

Stir in the tomato sauce and simmer five minutes, stirring occasionally. Add two remaining cups of stock (out of the original 2 1/2 cups) and sugar. Simmer for 15 minutes.

If made the day before, cool and refrigerate. Or if serving immediately, turn off heat and add shrimp. Cover the pot and let sit until shrimp are pink, about five to 10 minutes. Serve immediately with white cooked rice.

Recipe from "Chef Prudhomme's Louisiana Kitchen."

MONKFISH FILLETS WITH MUSTARD SAUCE

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 6 skinless monkfish fillets (about 2 1/4 pounds)
- salt and freshly ground pepper
- 4 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 1/3 cup finely chopped shallots
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 3/4 pound small fresh mushrooms
- 2 teaspoons dry white wine
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Preheat oven to 450° F.

Select a steel baking pan large enough to hold the fillets in one layer without crowding. Pour olive oil in the pan, then turn fillets in it to coat them well. Sprinkle the fillets with salt and pepper and brush them with mustard. Scatter the shallots, garlic and mushrooms around the fillets.

Place the pan over stovetop burners and heat until oil sizzles. Add wine and lower heat to a simmer.

Move pan to the oven and bake for 15 minutes. Bake fillets, and return them to the oven and bake for about five minutes longer.

Move fish to serving dishes, then swirl butter into pan until it melts. Pour butter over fillets, then sprinkle with parsley and serve.

Yield: 6 servings. *Recipe from "The Seafood Cookbook: Classic to Contemporary" by Pierre Franey and Bryan Miller.*

USDA offers safety advice

BY BARBARA ALBRIGHT FOR AP SPECIAL FEATURES

Susan Conley, director of education for the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the USDA, reminds cooks that the USDA offers advice on using a slow cooker.

Among the USDA's safety tips are these:

■ Make sure your hands, the cooker, work area and utensils are clean.

■ Keep perishable foods refrigerated until you are ready to use them. You can cut items up ahead of time, but store meat and vegetables separate from each other in the refrigerator.

■ Defrost meat or poultry before putting it in the slow cooker.

■ Select foods with a high moisture content such as soups, stews or spaghetti sauce.

■ Fill the cooker no less than half full and no more than two-thirds full. Vegetables cook more slowly than meat and poultry in a slow cooker so the vegetables should be placed around the bottom and side of the pot.

■ Do not use a slow cooker for a roast or whole chicken, because the food will cook so slowly it may remain in the bacterial danger zone for too long.

■ Keep the slow cooker's lid on, removing it only to stir the food or to check for doneness.

■ If the power goes out when you are not home, throw the food out. If you are at home, cook the food immediately by some other means such as a gas stove, on the outdoor grill or at a house where the power is on. If the food was completely cooked before the power went out, the food should remain safe up to two hours in the cooker with the power off.

■ Store leftovers in shallow covered containers and refrigerate within two hours after cooking. Reheating leftovers in a slow cooker is not recommended. However, cooked food can be brought to steaming on the stove top or in the microwave and then put in the preheated cooker to keep it hot for serving.

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