Caramel Apple Pie

This recipe uses a few less-than-common techniques, but the results are worth it! The unusual pie crust recipe results in the flakiest, easiest to roll dough I have ever worked with. Pre-cooking the apples in the caramel sauce keeps the filling from shrinking down as the pie bakes. Refrigerating the filling before adding it to the crust (along with the egg white wash) helps to ensure that the bottom crust doesn’t get soggy.

Ingredients

- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 Tablespoons granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 ½ sticks cold salted butter (1 1/4 cups), cut into 1/4” pats
- 6 Tablespoons cold water
- 4 to 5 large apples (about 6 cups), peeled, cored, and sliced, about 1/4” thick
- 6 Tablespoons salted butter
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 Tablespoon orange juice
- 1 Tablespoon milk (or half & half, or heavy cream)
- coarse granulated sugar crystals, for sprinkling

Method

1. For the crust, place 1 1/2 cups flour, 2 Tablespoons sugar, and 1/2 teaspoon salt in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade and pulse once or twice to combine. Distribute butter pieces over the top of the flour mixture and pulse until the flour is fully incorporated and the dough begins to collect in soft clumps (about 25 two-second pulses, but more or less if needed - my food processor is on the small side so it generally takes around 40 pulses for the dough to clump). Use a rubber spatula to evenly spread the dough clumps back around the bowl of the food processor. Distribute the remaining 1 cup flour over the dough and pulse about 5 or so times, until the dough is broken up, leaving a mixture of large and small buttery clumps. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and sprinkle it with the cold water. Using a large rubber spatula, fold the dough over and press it together with the spatula to incorporate the water and bring the dough together into a cohesive ball. Divide the dough roughly in half, form each half into a disk about 4 to 5 inches in diameter, and wrap each disk in plastic wrap. Refrigerate at least 2 hours before rolling and continuing. If desired, the dough can be kept in the refrigerator for a few days before finishing up the pie, just let it sit out at room temperature for 30 minutes or so before rolling.

2. For filling, melt 6 Tablespoons butter in a large Dutch oven over medium heat. Add flour to melted butter and stir to make a smooth paste. Continue cooking and stirring the butter-flour mixture for an additional 30 seconds. Add granulated sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, salt, vanilla and orange juice and mix until smooth. Continue cooking and stirring until the mixture comes to a boil, then turn heat down to low and add sliced apples, stirring to coat with caramel mixture. Continue simmering and stirring the apples in the caramel mixture for 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer apples and caramel mixture to a clean bowl or large baking dish and place in refrigerator to cool completely, about 1 hour.
3. To assemble the pie, preheat oven to 400°F and place a large baking sheet on a lower rack to heat up. Remove pie crust dough disks from the refrigerator and let sit at room temperature for several minutes. Using a rolling pin on a lightly floured surface, roll one disk to fit a 9-inch pie pan with about 1-inch overhang. (I like to roll to about 14 inches, then trim the extra.) Trim any excess dough. Optional: Brush bottom and sides of crust with a beaten egg white (this helps keep the bottom crust from getting soggy). Roll the second disk into a 12-inch circle and cut 10 to 12 strips, about 3/4-inch wide.

4. Pour the chilled filling (apples with caramel sauce) into the prepared bottom pie crust. (If there seems to be too much caramel liquid in the filling and it looks like it might overflow the pie plate, it is OK to leave some of the liquid out and not transfer it all into the bottom crust.) Weave the top crust strips into a lattice pattern over top of the filling and cut off any excess dough. Brush a little water under the edges of the lattice strips to help them stick to the bottom crust. Fold and crimp the excess crust to create a nice outside edge for the pie. Brush the top crust with milk (or half & half, or heavy cream) and sprinkle with coarse sugar.

5. Bake the pie at 400°F for 15 minutes, then turn heat down to 350°F and continue baking for another 40 to 45 minutes. Check the pie every 15 minutes or so and if the outside edges start to get too dark, cover the outside edge of the pie with foil and continue baking until the overall crust is golden brown. Allow to cool completely before slicing.

Notes

The pie crust follows the ingredients and general technique of the recipe "Easy Pie Dough Recipe" by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt posted on the Serious Eats website. The pie filling was inspired by "Chef John's Caramel Apple Pie" from the AllRecipes website, but was reworked considerably to achieve the final result.

Source: Paula Fox, Little River Bed & Breakfast (8 servings)