

CHRISTMAS MINCE PIES

RECIPE FROM

The Mousse Wonderful Time Of Year

(OXFORD TEAROOM MYSTERIES ~ BOOK 10)

MINCEMEAT

This is the key ingredient to mince pies! You can buy ready-made mincemeat but it is easy to make your own and you can add/adjust the different fruit portions and sweetness to suit your taste. Below is a traditional recipe but modern variations can also include dried cranberries, dried apricots, even dried tropical fruits like pineapple. You can also substitute rum or sherry instead of the traditional brandy. Contrary to popular belief, mincemeat does not need to be made months in advance—even a few days of marinating will produce wonderful flavours.

** Note: the traditional mincemeat recipe calls for “suet” which is a form of animal fat. This can be hard to source or you may not wish to use it. Alternatives can be used, although the end result might taste slightly different. Vegetable shortening is recommended as the best alternative, although butter can also be used (I personally tested the mincemeat recipe with butter and thought it tasted great!)

For the Mincemeat:

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 large Bramley (or Granny Smith) apple, finely chopped (*the skin can be left on if you wish*)
- 120 g (4¼ oz/½ cup) raisins
- 75 g (2¾ oz/½ cup) currants
- 85 g (3 oz/½ cup) sultanas (a.k.a. golden raisins)
- 55 g (2 oz/⅓ cup) mixed peel (mixed candied citrus peel)
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
- Finely grated zest of 1 small orange
- 2½ tablespoons lemon juice
- 2½ tablespoons orange juice
- 100 g (3½ oz/½ cup, lightly packed) dark brown (muscovado) sugar
- 40 g (1½ oz/¼ cup) chopped blanched almonds or almond flakes
- 65 g (2¼ oz/½ cup) suet (*or vegetable shortening or butter*) – *this should be finely grated or chopped into small pieces. Putting the butter in the freezer briefly makes it firm enough to chop or grate easily.*
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon



- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- Large pinch of ground cloves
- 80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) brandy

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Mix all the ingredients in a large, heatproof bowl and combine well – in particular, make sure that the pieces of suet/butter are well distributed and thoroughly mixed in with the other ingredients. Cover and set aside in a cool place overnight (or 12 hours) to marinate, so that the flavours have time to mingle and develop.
- 2) Preheat the oven to 120°C (235°F/Gas ½). Cover the bowl loosely with foil and cook for 2 hours, stirring occasionally.
- 3) Remove the bowl from the oven and set aside to cool, stirring it from time to time. The fat/butter should have melted and coated everything.
- 4) Once it has cooled, it can be transferred to sterilised jars and stored in the fridge (or even a cool, dark cupboard) for up to 6 months. Alternatively, it can be used immediately to fill mince pies in the recipe below.

For the Shortcrust Pastry (aka. “Pie Dough” in the U.S.)

Ready-made (frozen) **sweet shortcrust pastry**, (known as “pie dough” in the U.S.), works very well. (*A U.S. reader has recommended Pillsbury as making a “wonderful refrigerated ready-to-use pie dough”*). However, if you would like to make it from scratch, here are two recipes: the first is a **traditional British recipe for shortcrust pastry** and the second is a tried and tested **“easy pie dough” recipe** from **Kim McMahan Davis** of the [*Cinnamon and Sugar... and a Little Bit of Murder Blog*](#) who has kindly offered to let me share it with my readers.

(A) Traditional Shortcrust Pastry:

SHORTCRUST PASTRY INGREDIENTS:

- 375g (3 cups) plain flour
- 260g (approx. 1 ¼ cup) unsalted butter, softened
- 125g (1 cup) icing sugar, plus extra for sprinkling
- 1 egg
- A little cold water

SHORTCRUST PASTRY INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Mix the flour, icing sugar and butter in a large bowl, using your fingertips to gently rub the butter into the flour, until they are thoroughly mixed and the mixture resembles coarse breadcrumbs.
* *You can also do this in a food processor (on pulse mode), which will be quicker and might be better as you want to handle the flour as little as possible.*
- 2) Add in a bit of water at a time and mix gently (or pulse in the food processor) until the mixture comes together
- 3) Tip the mixture out onto a floured surface and gently fold until you get a smooth dough—but be careful not to overmix or knead too vigorously, otherwise the dough will become tough.
- 4) Divide the dough into two halves, wrap in cling film (plastic wrap) and chill in the refrigerator

for 30 minutes.

- 5) Preheat oven to 220C/200C fan/gas 7.
- 6) On a lightly floured surface, roll out one of the dough halves thinly (to about 3mm).
- 7) Use a round cutter that's slightly larger than the holes in a shallow tart pan (eg. 7cm) to cut out rounds of pastry to line each hole.
- 8) Fill each pastry case with a generous dollop of the mincemeat.
- 9) Roll out the second portion of dough and cut slightly smaller rounds (eg. 6.5cm) to place as lids over each pie.
- 10) Brush the edges of each pie with a bit of egg wash (egg beaten with a little water), then press gently down along the edges to seal. You can use the tines of a fork to press the two sections of dough together around the edges of the pie, as well as giving it a pretty ridged edge.
- 11) Place in the oven and bake for about 20 minutes or until the crusts are golden.
- 12) Remove from the oven and allow the pies to cool slightly, before gently taking them out of the tart pan. Place on a rack to cool. Sift icing sugar over the top of the pies and serve warm.

(B) Easy-Peasy Pie Crust

(from Kim McMahan Davis of the [Cinnamon and Sugar... and a Little Bit of Murder Blog](#))

PIE DOUGH INGREDIENTS:

- 2-1/2 cups (12-1/2 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons (1 ounce) granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1-1/4 cup vegetable shortening (*dairy-free and vegan version*)
- OR
- 3/4 cup vegetable shortening and 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, all thoroughly chilled.
- 1/4 cup vodka (any brand), chilled
- 2-3 tablespoons ice cold water

PIE DOUGH INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Place flour, sugar and salt in a food process and pulse 5 times until combined. (*Alternately, you can mix in a large bowl with a fork.*)
- 2) Add shortening (cut into medium/small pieces) and butter if using (cut into small cubes) and pulse about 15 times. (*Or use a pastry cutter and work shortening and butter in until it becomes small pea-sized.*)
- 3) Scrape down bowl and pulse 3 or 4 more times.
- 4) Mix 2 tablespoons of ice cold water with the chilled vodka and sprinkle over the flour mixture. If you live in a very dry place or have central air or heat going, you may need to add the additional tablespoon of water. This dough can handle being more moist than traditional pie crust recipes.
- 5) Pulse just until the dough begins to stick together. It took me about 6 pulses. You don't want it to come together in a ball. Overworking the dough is what makes it tough. (*Or use a fork to work the liquid into the dry ingredients.*)
- 6) Transfer the dough onto a non-stick surface and divide dough in half. Compress each half into

a ball and flatten, then wrap well with plastic wrap.

- 7) Refrigerate for at least an hour and up to 3 days.
- 8) Remove one disk from the refrigerator and place on well-floured work surface. Flour the top of the dough along with your rolling pin.

Continue from Step 9 in the Shortcrust Pastry recipe above.

Enjoy!