

# Pining For Pies: Traditional Versions Have Nostalgic Appeal

BY JUDY HEVRDEJS

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(MCT)

Nostalgia and our national sweet tooth are nudging some bakers into the kitchen to give pies a try. Old-fashioned pies especially.

Paula Haney understands this. When the Indiana native opened her Hoosier Mama Pie Shop in Chicago, she made sure that six pies she considers iconic — apple, banana cream, chocolate cream, pecan, cherry and lemon meringue — would be available.

“Those are the biggies that people have emotional feelings about. They taste good, and that’s the reason they’ve survived,” says Haney. “But those six pies also tend to be the things that their mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers made. Those are ones people love.

“I wanted to make sure we preserved some of these traditional pies,” says Haney. “I felt that that whole part of our cooking heritage was being lost.”

Yet our appetite for pie doesn’t mean everyone took pie-baking lessons from granny. Perhaps that’s why there are so many new pie-focused cookbooks with more on the way, including “Pieography: Where Pie Meets Biography,” by Jo Packham, with food notables offering pies that capture “the essence” of their lives.

Most aim to erase any fears that pie-baking is difficult or complicated.

“Many folks shy away from pie, thinking it’s much too finicky or persnickety for them,” Ashley English writes in her book, “A Year of Pies: A Seasonal Tour of Home Baked Pies,” (Lark Crafts, \$19.95). “I can tell you with the utmost confidence that baking pie is considerably easier than baking many, many other things.

“Creating a delicious pie emboldens you while it satiates you. It lifts you up and gives you hope,” English adds. “I know that sounds grandiose (it’s only humble pie, after all, right?), but it’s true. Crafting and baking a pie is an exercise in patience with a reward in contentment.”

“It’s like making bread. You can’t just follow a recipe and have it turn out. There’s a little bit of skill there,” says Haney, who has a pie cookbook in the works. “The recipe for the pie crust is going to be variable depending on the weather and humidity, so you kind of have to have a feel for it. Now once you do, then it’s really pretty easy. You only have flour, butter and cold water. So I think it takes on this sort of magical thing.

“When people come up with a good pie crust, it’s ‘How did I turn these three ingredients into something so good?’ ... It’s just a matter of getting a feel for it and knowing what to look for.”

So taste a lot of pie and pie crust, says Haney.

“Pie should just fill up your mouth with flavor. You hit salty and sweet and bitter. ... It should be balanced. The texture shouldn’t be gelatinous. It should be kind of silky. And the crust should be good on its own. You should be able to eat a piece of crust and have it taste good.”

Thinking of giving pie baking a try? Perhaps an apple (Vermont’s state pie) or Key lime (Florida’s). Or, this old-fashioned banana cream pie.

### BANANA CREAM PIE

Prep: 30 minutes  
Cook: 15-20 minutes, plus time to bake crust  
Chill: 1 hour  
Makes: One 9-inch pie, 8 servings

Note: Adapted from “American Cooking,” part of Time-Life’s Foods of the World series (1968).

Ingredients:  
1/2 cup sugar  
5 tablespoons flour  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
3 egg yolks  
2 cups milk  
2 tablespoons butter, in -inch pieces  
1/2 teaspoon vanilla  
1 1/2 cups chilled whipping cream  
3 large, ripe bananas, peeled, sliced into 1/4-inch rounds  
1 9-inch pie shell, baked, cooled

Directions:  
1. Sift sugar, flour and salt into a large mixing bowl. With a large spoon, beat in yolks one at a time. Heat milk and butter in a small saucepan until butter melts and small bubbles form around pan’s edge. Slowly pour it into the mixing bowl, a little at a time and stirring constantly with a whisk so the eggs don’t curdle. Stir in vanilla. Return mixture to saucepan. Heat almost to a boil; reduce heat to low. Simmer, stirring, until it thickens to a heavy custard; cool to lukewarm.

2. Meanwhile, beat 1/2 cup cream until it forms firm peaks. Gently but thoroughly fold into cooled custard. Spread 1/4-inch custard on bottom of pie shell; arrange a layer of bananas on top. Continue layering custard and bananas, ending with a layer of bananas. Beat remaining cream until stiff. Spread atop pie in decorative

swirls. Chill at least 1 hour before serving.

Nutrition information:  
Per serving: 448 calories, 28 g fat, 15 g saturated fat, 144 mg cholesterol, 43 g carbohydrates, 8 g protein, 236 mg sodium, 2 g fiber.

### WHAT THE PROS KNOW

From Ashley English’s “A Year of Pies.”

“Make it cold, bake it hot.”  
“Keep your hands cool, especially when adding rolled dough to the pie pan then decoratively forming the edges.” If you wash your hands while making pie, give them a cold rinse.

“Don’t lose your cool and your pie will reward you with abundant flakiness.”

To avoid watery fillings giving you a soggy bottom crust: “(Try) blind baking the crust first, to crisp it up a bit.”

Cheryl Day, co-owner of Back in the Day Bakery in Savannah, Ga.

Organize: “Have the proper tools and ingredients at the proper temperature.”

Chill: “If you find the butter starts to get a little soft, put your bowl in the refrigerator and let it chill a little bit. The crust needs to be cold when it hits the oven so

you get that nice puffy, flaky texture.”

Paula Haney, Hoosier Mama Pie Shop

Don’t overmix: “If you’re using a mixer (or) food processor, (the crust) should still be crumbly when you dump it out on the table and knead it together.”

Get your hands in it: “If it’s sticking to your hands and you really can’t get it off, then you need to add a little flour. If you get done with your dough and you squeeze it together and it won’t hold together, it’s going to need a bit more water.”



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