

How to Make the Best Pumpkin Pie

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We set about to find out what made the best pumpkin pie. In our test kitchen, we kept making pies, changing ingredients and experimenting. We fed pumpkin pie to our staff until they would have no more. We handed out slices topped with dollops of whipped cream to customers in our store.

We soon discovered that people preferred a more flavorful pie. They did not like bland pies and when we handed out the more flavorful versions, even those that said they didn't like pumpkin pie, tended to like these.

So how do you make a more flavorful pumpkin pie? We took two approaches: changing the spices and altering the filling materials. Along the way, we found that more eggs made for a lighter filling.



We started with four large eggs in a standard nine inch pie along with 2 cups of pumpkin and one twelve-ounce can of evaporated milk. (We definitely preferred pies made with evaporated milk to those made with fresh milk or cream.) The result was a very light pie. While warm, it reminded us a bit of a pumpkin chiffon pie. When it cooled, it became a little denser but it was still a light pie. Many of our testers preferred this pie. The recipe follows:

Four Egg Extra Light Pumpkin Pie

2 cups canned pumpkin
4 large eggs
3/4 cup granulated sugar
1 12-ounce can evaporated milk
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
1/2 teaspoon allspice

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

1. Form the pie shell. You may use our pie crust mix or your favorite recipe. Make a built up crust as shown below if you are using a standard nine-inch pie pan. If not, use a deep dish pie pan. A dark pan works best.
2. Mix all the ingredients together with your stand-type mixer or an electric beater until smooth. Some fibers may stick to the beaters; remove and discard them.
3. Place the pie shell on a rack in the center of the oven. Immediately pour the filling into the pie shell.
4. Bake for 15 minutes at 400 degrees. Reduce the heat to 350 degrees, cover the crust with a pie shield, and bake for another 40 minutes or until done. A knife inserted near the center should come out clean when done.
5. Cool in a pan on a rack. When cool, slip the pie out of the pan to a serving plate for cutting and serving.

Adding Yams or Dry Pumpkin

When I lived in the South, I found many versions of sweet potato and yam pies—some of which were close cousins to pumpkin pies. But pumpkin has an earthier flavor than yams. So we made pies with all pumpkin and yams and with mixtures of the two.

Yams give the pie a brighter orange color that is attractive and a very light, mellow flavor. Many of us really liked the all-yam version. In the end, we settled on about a 50-50 version, about half yam.

As a variation to the all pumpkin version, we added 1/4 cup dry pumpkin powder. It intensified the flavor, not dramatically but noticeably. It also turned the pie much darker—not unattractive but darker. When we served that to testers, some really liked the pie and remarked that it had more flavor.

About the Spices

The Libby's® recipe found on the back of their pumpkin cans seems to be the standard in pumpkin pies. We, and most of our testers, found it a little too bland. It calls for one teaspoon of cinnamon, a half-teaspoon of ginger, and 1/4 teaspoon of cloves. With a little experimenting, we settled on one teaspoon of cinnamon, a half-teaspoon of ginger, 1/2 teaspoon of cloves, and 1/2 teaspoon of allspice. That is, we had twice as much ground cloves and an addition of allspice—enough to make the pie noticeably spicier. Repeatedly, testers said that this was better than other pumpkin pies that they had made.

Our Best Pumpkin Pie

The recipe that we concluded was the best, the most popular, has three eggs, an approximate 50% addition of yam, and a spice mixture including allspice. The recipe follows.

1 1/4 cup canned pumpkin
1 cup cooked yam
3 large eggs
3/4 cup granulated sugar
1 12-ounce can evaporated milk
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
1/2 teaspoon allspice



Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

1. Form the pie shell. You may use our pie crust mix or your favorite recipe. Make a built up crust as shown if you are using a standard nine-inch pie pan. If not, use a deep dish pie pan. A dark pan works best.
2. Mix all the ingredients together with your stand-type mixer or an electric beater until smooth. Some fibers may stick to the beaters; remove and discard them.
3. Place the pie shell on a rack in the center of the oven. Immediately pour the filling into the pie shell.
4. Bake for 15 minutes at 400 degrees. Reduce the heat to 350 degrees, cover the crust with a pie shield, and bake for another 40 minutes or until done. A knife inserted near the center should come out clean when done.
5. Cool in a pan on a rack. When cool, slip the pie out of the pan to a serving plate for cutting and serving.

Sweet Potato Pie with Pecan Streusel (in a Gingersnap Crust)

I'm more of a baker than a cook so I don't use a lot of fresh ginger. But the ginger in this recipe, along with the butter rum flavor, just makes a wonderful pie. Of course, the pecan streusel certainly helps.

This is an outstanding pie. While it certainly works for holiday dinners as an alternative to pumpkin pies, this should not be relegated to holidays. We think this will be one of your favorite pies, something to turn to whenever fresh fruit is not in season.

Dennis Weaver

For the crust

1 1/2 tablespoon freshly ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
3 tablespoons sugar
1 1/2 cup just-add-water pie crust mix
2 to 3 tablespoons cold water

1. Mix the ginger, sugar, and cinnamon with one-fourth cup of the pie crust mix. Stir well to distribute the ginger. (The key to this crust is getting the fresh ginger evenly distributed in the crust.) Stir this mixture into the remaining pie crust mix until it is well distributed. (You may also use a food processor to mix the ingredients.)
2. Add the water. Stir with a fork to form a dough ball.
3. Roll out the dough and form the crust in a deep dish pie pan. Form a decorate edge that also acts as a dam to reduce spills. (See picture for a recommended edge.)

For the filling

2 cups cooked and mashed sweet potatoes
3 large eggs
3/4 cup sugar
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon fresh ginger
1 teaspoon cinnamon
2 teaspoons butter rum flavor

In your stand-type mixer with the whip attachment, beat the sweet potatoes until well mashed. Add the other filling ingredients and mix until combined.

For the streusel

3/4 cup pecan pieces
1/2 cup all purpose flour
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/3 cup butter

In a medium bowl, combine the pecan pieces, flour, brown sugar, and cinnamon. With a pastry knife, cut in the butter until the pieces are no larger than peas. Set aside.

To assemble and bake the pie.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

1. Pour the filling into the unbaked pie shell. Spoon the streusel over the top.
2. Place a pie shield over the edges of the crust or form a shield from strips of aluminum foil.
3. Bake for 15 minutes at 400 degrees. Reduce the heat and continue baking at 350 degrees for another 40 minutes or until done. Baking times will vary depending on the oven. As it bakes, streusel top will look wet and soft. When done, all but the very center will be set and the interior of the pie will register 170 degrees with an insta-read thermometer when done. Remove from the oven and cool on a wire rack.

Serve with whipped cream.



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