

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

pennysavernews@aol.com

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

## **HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu

### Thanksgiving - Pie for Dessert?

If your household is anywhere near 'average' for American meals on Thanksgiving, you'll probably have at least one pie on the table for dessert after the turkey. The legends of the Pilgrims all say that they ate pumpkin pie on the first Thanksgiving Day, right? Well, they might have eaten what they called pie, but it probably didn't resemble what we call pie today, especially here in the US.

Centuries ago most pies were savory. That meant that the filling was meat, fish, vegetables or a combination, with a salty, seasoned flavor. They had a dough crust on top and bottom. Some were baked in a dish with the dough lining the dish, others just had the dough wrapped around the filling, more like empanadas today. Some of these were baked, others were fried.

Over the years, especially in America, our ideas of what makes a pie have changed drastically. When we think of pie, mostly we think of sweets, even super-sweet like chocolate pecan bourbon. Also, many of our favorite family pies have no top crust. Lemon pies have only meringue, pecan pies have a layer of nuts, poor old pumpkin pie often goes with no topping at all. Both Boston Cream Pie and Shoo Fly Pie are really cakes going by a pie name!

So, if you're going to have a sweet pie for dessert, what makes a good one? For old school cooks the best way to judge a pie was by its crust. A good pie crust had to be flakey, never tough and not crumbly. These days most people choose to buy frozen

pie crusts. But if you're going to make your own crust, two steps are crucial for flakes. One is to be sure that both the shortening and the water you use are cold. If they're warm they soak into the flour and make it tough. When they're cold they just coat the outside and make flakes. Secondly, don't knead the dough. You want to just mix it enough to get it to stick together. Kneading develops the gluten. That means it gets stringy and tough. Chill it again before you roll it out, and keep it cold the whole time.

As for fillings, the sky's the limit. Fruit pies are favorites, but you can always spice them up a little bit. Add some grated ginger or chopped fresh mint to apple or pear pies for a new twist on flavor. If you're not counting calories, add a layer of chocolate or butterscotch chips under or in the middle of the pumpkin or pecan filling. The new flavor rage is bacon, and there are recipes with bacon pieces on top of pie. Of course jalapeño and salt were the flavor darlings last year, so those recipes are around too. Just search the internet, you can probably find even more combinations.

Most pie recipes use a fairly hot oven temperature. This allows the flour to stiffen before the fat soaks in, another way to keep pastry crusts flakey and light instead of chewy. Some recipes call for 'blind baking'. This means you bake the empty crust first, then add the filling. Occasionally the crust is brushed with egg white before it's baked. The egg is to help seal the crust and keep the filling from soaking into it later. Custard pies are sometimes baked in one pie plate while the crust bakes in another. Then the pie is slipped gently (you hope!) into the crust. This keeps the crust from getting soggy.

Finally, you get to top your pie. If meringue is your choice, make the meringue while the pie is in the oven. Pile it onto the pie while the filling is hot, then slip it back into the oven to brown. The heat from the filling will bake the inside of the meringue

while the oven bakes the outside. You get a safe meringue that doesn't shrink or weep as much.

As another example of what we call a 'pie' that our ancestors would not, here's a blueberry pie without a crust (so fewer calories). It has a nice crunchy topping to balance the soft sweetness of the berries. Cooking it in the microwave won't heat up the kitchen either. Serve with ice cream or frozen yogurt - delicious!

#### Crustless Blueberry 'Pie'

3 cups fresh or frozen blueberries	1/3 cup sugar
3 Tbsp flour	½ tsp grated lemon zest (yellow skin)
½ tsp ground cinnamon	½ tsp ground nutmeg
½ cup quick cooking oats	2 Tbsp brown sugar
½ tsp ground cinnamon	1 ½ Tbsp firm margarine

(If berries are frozen microwave on High for 2-3 minutes.) Combine berries, sugar, flour, lemon zest, ½ tsp cinnamon and nutmeg in large bowl and mix gently. Pour into 8 or 9-inch microwave-safe pie plate. Mix oats, brown sugar and rest of cinnamon in a bowl. Use a fork or two knives to cut the margarine into the oats until the mixture is crumbly and there are no big lumps of margarine left. Sprinkle over berries. Microwave on High for 5 minutes. Reduce to Medium and microwave another 3-5 minutes until berry mixture bubbles and gets thick. Serve warm. Serves 8.