

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Pies for the Holidays

Apple pie, cherry pie, mincemeat pie, of course pecan pie (chocolate or not) and pumpkin pie! Or maybe Aunt Nan's chess pie and Grandmother Emily's buttermilk pie! What other pies are in your holiday heritage? If you come from Amish country there's sure to be a molasses and spice shoo fly pie. These are just some of the sweet pie options. There are also savorys, filled with meat, onions and more. Pies in one form or another have been around for centuries. Some are 'everyday' type pies, while others tend to show up on the table just for the holidays.

What makes it a pie? Generally a pie has a crust on either the bottom, or both top and bottom, with a filling in the middle. The crust was traditionally a rolled pastry, but crumb crusts are common now too. A few savory pies, such as chicken pot pie usually have dough just on top. Shepherd's pie uses mashed potatoes instead of a dough crust. The fruit dishes with a crust or covering on top but not on the bottom are called bettys, cobblers, crumbles or grunts rather than pies.

These days, with our growing concern over our growing waistlines, many people are choosing to skip the bottom crust on pies. Some folks have never eaten the bottom crust just because they didn't like it. But eliminating the bottom crust from a pie, especially a fruit pie, is a great way to reduce the calories. That's because the crust is often where all or most of the fat is. A rolled pastry crust is about 1/3 fat. Even crumb crusts such as graham cracker or chocolate cookie crumbs have butter or oil included to hold them together. Skip the crust and you can cut the calories almost in half.

You can still make a pretty rolled crust for the top. Decorate it with cutouts of stars, bells, leaves or fruits. It will look great on the table, and will taste just as wonderful. Or, go for a crumble topping instead of pastry. Use oatmeal and nuts to increase the nutritional value, and sprinkle it on thinly. If you're really looking to cut back on calories, substitute a dense bran cereal (like Grape Nuts®) for part of the nuts. This even works in the filling of pecan pies! While the pie is fresh no one will notice. They do tend to get soft by the second day, but who has any pie left by then?

To decorate a crumble topping, place a cookie cutter on the filling. Sprinkle the topping around it but not in it. Then carefully remove the cutter and bake the pie. The design will let the color of the

filling show through, and that's pretty enough to eat!

Cream and custard-based fillings often call for evaporated milk, or sometimes sweetened condensed milk. This is because these milks have half the water removed. That means the fillings are less watery, so they take less time to bake. And these milks still have all their protein, which helps to firm the filling more quickly. A recipe using whole milk will often call for more eggs, or the addition of powdered milk to increase the protein and firm the pie.

Since sweetened condensed milk has about $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of sugar in each of those little cans, these recipes often do not use additional sugar. They might look simpler, but the sugar is still all there. If the recipe calls for evaporated but all you have on hand is condensed, reduce the rest of the sugar in the recipe by about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup. If the recipe calls for condensed, here's a quick emergency substitute. Combine 1 cup of instant nonfat dry milk, $\frac{2}{3}$ cup granulated sugar, 3 Tbsp melted butter or margarine and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of boiling water and process or beat in a blender until smooth.

Now being that here in Florida our holiday season is often warmer than the rest of the country, here's a frozen pie to grace your table. It won't take up space in the oven, but it's definitely not low calorie. You can hide it in the freezer so you won't be tempted to go for seconds. Happy Holidays!

Frozen Peanut Butter Pie

4 oz cream cheese, softened	1 cup confectioners' sugar
$\frac{1}{3}$ cup peanut butter	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk
9 oz frozen whipped topping, thawed	1 baked 9" pie shell, pastry or cracker
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup finely chopped peanuts or mini chocolate chips	

Prepare and bake pie shell according to package directions. Beat cream cheese in mixing bowl until light and fluffy. Add sugar and peanut butter gradually and beat until blended. Add milk gradually, beating constantly until smooth. Fold in whipped topping. Spoon into baked and cooled pie shell. Sprinkle with chopped peanuts or chocolate chips. (Use the cookie cutter tip above to make a design in the topping if desired.) Freeze until firm. Serves 8 or 10.

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