

MINCE PIES

The mincemeat in this recipe is quick to prepare and needs no time to mature, making these an easy festive treat to bake.

Makes 18

Prep 20 mins

Prep ahead the pastry can be made 2 days ahead and kept in the refrigerator, wrapped in cling film, or frozen for up to 8 weeks

Chill 10 mins

Bake 10–12 mins

Store the pies will keep for 3 days in an airtight container

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

7.5cm (3in) round pastry cutter and 6cm (2½in) round or shaped cutter
fairy cake tin

INGREDIENTS

1 small cooking apple
30g (1oz) butter, melted
85g (3oz) sultanas
85g (3oz) raisins
55g (1¾oz) currants
45g (1½oz) mixed peel, chopped
45g (1½oz) chopped almonds or hazelnuts
finely grated zest of 1 lemon
1 tsp mixed spice
1 tbsp brandy or whisky
30g (1oz) dark brown muscovado sugar
1 small banana, finely diced
500g (1lb 2oz) shortcrust pastry, shop-bought, or see page 330, steps 1–4
plain flour, for dusting
icing sugar, for dusting

1 Preheat the oven to 190°C (375°F/Gas 5). To make the mincemeat, grate the apple (including the skin) into a large bowl. Add the melted butter, sultanas, raisins, currants, mixed peel, nuts, lemon zest, mixed spice, brandy or whisky, and sugar. Mix until well combined. Add the banana and mix again.

2 Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured work surface to a thickness of 2mm (scant ¼in) and cut out 18 circles using the larger biscuit cutter. Re-roll the pastry, and cut 18 smaller circles or festive shapes, such as stars.

3 Line fairy cake tins with the larger pastry circles, and place a heaped teaspoon of mincemeat in each case. Top with the smaller circles or shapes.

4 Chill for 10 minutes, then bake for 10–12 minutes or until the pastry is golden. Carefully remove from the tins and cool on a wire rack. Dust with icing sugar to serve.



BAKER'S TIP

Home-made mincemeat will always taste far superior to any shop-bought version. The diced banana used in this recipe might not be an orthodox ingredient, but it does lend a rich, velvety texture to the mincemeat.



PLUM PUDDING

So-named because it contains prunes, this is a classic Christmas dish, here using butter instead of the traditional beef suet.

Serves 8–10

Prep 45 mins

Soak overnight

Bake 8–10 hrs

Store the pudding will keep in a cool place (if well sealed), or in the freezer for up to 1 year

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

1kg (2½lb) pudding bowl

INGREDIENTS

85g (3oz) raisins

60g (2oz) currants

100g (3½oz) sultanas

45g (1½oz) mixed peel, chopped

115g (4oz) mixed dried fruit, such as figs, dates, and cherries

150ml (5fl oz) beer

1 tbsp whisky or brandy

finely grated zest and juice of 1 orange

finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon

85g (3oz) ready-to-eat prunes, chopped

150ml (5fl oz) cold black tea

1 dessert apple, peeled, cored, and grated

115g (4oz) unsalted butter, melted, plus extra for greasing

175g (6oz) dark soft brown sugar

1 tbsp black treacle

2 eggs, beaten

60g (2oz) self-raising flour

1 tsp mixed spice

115g (4oz) fresh white breadcrumbs

60g (2oz) chopped almonds

brandy butter, cream, or custard, to serve (optional)

1 Place the first 9 ingredients into a large bowl and mix well. Put the prunes in a small bowl and pour in the tea. Cover the bowls and leave to soak overnight.

2 Drain the prunes and discard any remaining tea. Add the prunes and the apple to the rest of the fruit, followed by the butter, sugar, treacle, and eggs, stirring well.

3 Sift in the flour along with the mixed spice, then stir in the breadcrumbs and almonds. Mix until all the ingredients are well combined.

4 Grease the pudding bowl and pour in the mixture. Cover the top of the bowl with 2 layers of baking parchment and 1 layer of foil. Tie the layers to the bowl with string, then put the bowl into a pan of simmering water that comes at least halfway up the side of the bowl. Steam for 8–10 hours.

5 Check regularly to make sure that the water level does not drop too low. Serve with brandy butter, cream, or custard.



BAKER'S TIP

When steaming a pudding for an extended time, it is very important that the water level in the pan should not drop too low. There are a couple of easy ways to avoid this. Either set a timer every hour, to remind you to check the water level, or put a marble in the pan so it rattles when the water level drops.

