

RECIPES FOR KIT-CAT PIES

From: Field, Ophelia, *The Kit-Cat Club: Friends Who Imagined a Nation*. New York: Harper Press, 2009.



Mr Christopher (Kit) Cat's original pie recipe have not survived. Though some sources speak of Cat baking all sorts of sweet and savory pastries, several specify that the Kit-Cat Pie was a form of mutton pie. Mutton pies in the 1690s would have been a type of 'sweetmeat', involving a great deal of fruit and sugar – sometimes to disguise less than perfectly fresh meat, and always to assist with preservation. English pie lids of this date were also highly and would have been presented as table centerpieces.

ORIGINAL PASTRY RECIPE

Paste for a high Pie:

Lay down a peck of flour and work it up with 3 pound of butter melted in a Saucepan of boiling liquor and make it into a stiff paste.

NOTE on quantities: A 'peck' is equivalent to a quarter bushel (or 7 1/2 lbs.). The recipe below is 2 lbs only – approximately enough to make two of the pies below according to their 'translated' (and thus scaled down) recipes. For a single pie of no great size, you could half the ingredients.

NOTE on sequence: When it comes to lining the pie tins and also sealing on the pie lids, it is necessary to work while the pastry is still somewhat warm and moist, therefore it is wise to prepare the fillings for the pies before making the pastry. If cooking in large quantities, it may be useful to make one batch of pastry for the linings and then another fresh batch for the lids.

NOTE on edibility: While the below pastry recipe makes a perfectly edible pastry, largely thanks to the extra ingredient of sugar, it should be noted that the hot-water pastry of the 1690s/1700s was intended primarily to serve as a cooking vessel and as decoration. Do not, in other words, feel bad if your diners leave a lot of the pastry on their plates.

Ingredients:

300ml water

200g lard

200g unsalted butter

900g plain flour

2 egg yolks

1 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons icing sugar
And an extra egg, beaten, to glaze

Instructions:

Bring the water to the boil, then add the lard and the butter and stir until melted. (Butter can replace the lard if necessary, though this will make for less solid pastry.)

Pour flour in a mixing bowl, then add the egg yolks, salt and sugar. Mix well. Gradually pour in the hot water and melted fats, mixing constantly. Mix until dough is smooth and can be handled. If it remains far too wet and sticky to roll, add more flour.

Roll out to about 1/2 cm in thickness, ready for use.

ORIGINAL PIE RECIPE NO.1

Sweet Lamb Pie:

Cut a hind quarter of lamb into thin slices

Season it with sweet spice [Sweet spice is Cloves, Mace, Nutmeg, Cinnamon, Sugar and Salt] and lay it in the pie mixed with half a pound of raisins of the sun, stoned, half a pound of currants, 2 or 3 Spanish potatoes boiled, blanched and sliced or an artichoke bottom or two, with Prunella, Damsons, Gooseberries, Grapes, Citron and Lemon Chips, lay on butter and close the pie. When tis baked make for it a Caudle.

Ingredients:

Pie pastry (as in recipe above)

1/2 leg of lamb, cut off the bone and cut into small cubes

1/4 teaspoon crushed cloves

1/4 teaspoon mace

1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 lb (or 110g) sultanas

1/4 lb (or 110g) currants

2 small sweet potatoes (or 2 artichoke hearts), boiled and sliced 2 prunes

2 plums, preferably Damson

1/4 lb (or 110g) gooseberries

1 lemon

1/4 block (c.60g) of butter

A deep-sided, medium-sized pie dish or cake tin (e.g. 15-25cm diameter, 5cm deep). NOT an American pie dish with shallow sloping sides.

Instructions:

Set the dried fruit to soak in bowl(s) of lukewarm water for at least an hour.

Preheat oven to 150°C (300°F)

De-stone and roughly chop prunes and plums.

In a mixing bowl, combine the spices (crushed cloves, mace, nutmeg, cinnamon, sugar, salt) with the sultanas, currants, chopped prunes and plums, gooseberries, and the zest of the lemon. Cut the same zested lemon in half and squeeze in the juice of one half. Add the chopped meat and mix thoroughly with hands.

Make pastry (as in recipe above), roll and line pie-dish, ensuring that some overlaps the edge on all sides. Also, preserve sufficient dough to make a lid. Layer in the meat/fruit mixture, with slices of the sweet potato or artichoke heart and thin slices of the other half of (peeled by zesting) lemon, pips removed.

Distribute three dessert spoons of butter around the top of the pie filling.

Roll remaining pastry to lay over the dish as a lid.

Fold excess from sides of pie tin in towards the center of the pie. Paint these flaps with beaten egg as glue. Lay over the pie lid and pinch edges tightly closed. Make a hole in the center and place a small funnel/hollow-cigar of rolled tinfoil or writing paper into it (or use a ceramic 'pie bird' or 'pie funnel' for the same purpose). Paint lid with beaten egg to glaze, and stick on other pastry bits of decoration if wishes, using the egg as glue.

Place in center of oven and bake for about 3 hours. If the lid becomes overly brown, place a sheet of foil on top.

ORIGINAL RECIPE FOR CONDIMENT

To make 'Catchup': Take a pint of Claret, a pint of Vinegar and 6 ounces of Anchovies and whole Spice. Boil it together till it is dissolved. Strain it through a fine sieve and keep it in a bottle.

ORIGINAL GRAVY RECIPE

To draw Gravy of Veal, Beef or Mutton:

Take Part of a Buttock of Beef, a fillet or Veal, or a Leg of Mutton. Cut it in Collops as thick as your little Finger, and hack it well. Take a broad Stew pan and lay in the Bottom some Butter and some Slices of bacon, then lay over your Beef, Veal or Mutton. Cut three or four large Onions in Slices and lay over and a Carrot sliced. You may strew over a little fine Flour or not. Set it over a moderate Fire and let it stove, being close covered, till it be very brown, stirring it sometimes to keep it from burning. And when it is worked very brown you must put in your Broth, as much as you have Occasion for, that is, as much as your Meat will brown and give a good Colour to. Let it boil pretty well, put in a Faggot of Sweet herbs and when boiled slice in a Lemon, and strain it out for your Use. A good Pan of Meat will make six Quarts or two Gallons of good Gravy.

2-3 escalopes cut from beef or veal rumpsteak or mutton/lamb leg

6 tablespoons butter

4 strips bacon or pancetta

3-4 onions

1 carrot

2 tablespoons plain flour

1 lemon

1 lamb, beef or vegetable stock cube

Several sprigs each of basil, parsley and mint, tied together into a bouquet with (uncoloured) thread or string

A saucepan or casserole dish.

NOTE on quantities: This recipe has been scaled down primarily by reducing the amount of liquid added. More liquid can be added if more gravy is desired. The whole lemon makes this gravy taste primarily like a lemon sauce, so reduce to a squeeze of lemon if a more meaty flavor is preferred.

Instructions:

Chop the meat into small cubes and the bacon into pieces.

Fry the bacon, add the butter and then brown the meat inside a deep, thick-bottomed stewing pan or casserole dish, over a medium heat. Do so until it is very well browned.

Roughly peel and chop the onions and the carrot and add to the pan, along with a cup (250ml) of water.

When simmering, sprinkle in the flour and stir well, dispersing lumps.

Cover and leave to simmer over a moderate heat for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Dissolve the stock cube in two cups (500ml) of hot water and add to the pan, along with the sprigs of basil, parsley and mint. Bring to a boil.

Slice the lemon and add. Continue to boil for 20 minutes.

Strain and reserve the gravy. Pick out the meat pieces with a fork and re-mix with the strained gravy, ready for pouring into or over the pies (see above).

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