



Tartes and all Their Charms

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Born and raised in West Michigan, Susan returned to Grand Rapids in September of 2015 after a 20-year hiatus, during which she made the decision to leave her career as an emergency medicine physician and pursue her passion for fine pastry.

In 2006 she attended the baking and pastry program at Apicius Culinary Institute in Florence, followed by completion of *Le Diplôme de Pâtisserie* at *Le Cordon Bleu* in Paris. She experienced two stints as a *stagiaire* in a small Parisian pastry shop in 2007 and has returned to Paris on a number of occasions for professional classes at *Le Cordon Bleu*, *Le Nôtre*, *École Alain Ducasse* and *Les Cours de Christophe Felder*.

Susan has held the position of pastry chef at Gerrish's café in Winter Harbor, Maine as well as at Gracie's, a Mobil 4 star fine dining restaurant in Providence, RI. She is the chef owner of The French Tarte, a small artisanal pastry business launched in 2012 in Pawtucket, RI with a focus on teaching French pastry classes, accepting special orders and selling retail pastries during the busy Winter Farmers Market.

Now based in Grand Rapids MI, The French Tarte offers private or small group classes in French pastry techniques in the comfort of your home. Susan also enjoys creating lovely and delicious assortments for brunch, afternoon tea, dessert buffets, special occasion celebrations and luncheons.

Focused on sharing the importance of hands-on pastry preparation and understanding the characteristics and nuances of dough in general, Susan's particular interests lie in laminated dough (croissant, puff pastry, Danish) as well as *tartes*, *sablés*, brioche and yeast breads.

In the fall of 2014 Susan launched her blog "Baking with The French Tarte" as a way to share her common sense approach to recipe evaluation and interpretation as well as her observations, tips and techniques. And it's fun!

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TARTES AND ALL THEIR CHARMS

There is something so appealing about an array of beautiful *tartes* in the window of a Parisian pastry shop. From a pristine, mirror-like *tarte au citron* to an exquisite pastry cream *tarte* topped with a cascade of fresh fruits, there is a wealth of variety to be experienced in the world of *tartes*.

Unlike most American pie, a tart is made with a single crust, which can be filled with almost anything you can imagine from citrus curd to custard to *ganache* to fruits or nuts. Fluted or smooth, blind baked or not, shaped as a square, rectangle, circle or free form, chilled or warm – so many ways to create your own version of deliciousness.

One of the keys to a great *tarte* is a great crust. If you're planning on regular *tarte* making, I suggest you develop your own repertoire of 2 or 3 tart dough recipes that will serve you in good stead.

First, a few baking basics:

MISE EN PLACE

This is the French term for “set in place”. As you prepare to create something tasty in your kitchen, always read your recipe through (twice!), make sure you have the necessary ingredients on hand and be aware of steps like bringing ingredients to room temperature or softening butter. It's all part of the planning.

I prefer to weigh all ingredients using metric weights. I provide recipes with both gram weights and American measures so you can make the comparisons. When you total the gram weights of all the ingredients in a recipe, it gives you the total weight of the dough you'll be making – perfect for planning ahead when deciding the number and sizes of *tartes* you wish to make (see **GUIDELINES** further on).

Planning ahead is a big part of baking, so when making your favorite dough, don't be afraid to double or triple your recipe (by weight). Then divide the dough into approximately 260 gram or 9 ounce pieces (good for a standard 9” tart), wrap them well and pop them in the fridge (if using within 2 days) or in the freezer for several months. If freezing the dough, just pull out what you need the night before baking day and place it in the fridge to thaw.

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HANDLING DOUGH

In general, once a dough is mixed, it should be wrapped to rest and chill in the fridge for at least an hour or overnight. This allows the flour to absorb moisture, the dough to relax and become easier to roll out.

Always work the dough cool on either a lightly floured surface (I love wood!) or between two sheets of parchment or plastic wrap. When rolling directly on your chosen surface, don't forget to lift, turn and "fluff" the dough periodically to make sure it's not sticking and to help it relax. Working efficiently and with the least amount of rolling to achieve your desired thickness makes for a delicious, tender crust.

DON'T OVERDO IT!

Rolling the dough to a thickness of approximately 1/8 inch or about 3-4 mm is pleasing and provides a nice contrast between filling and crust, particularly when making petite tarts. There's nothing less palatable than taking a bite of a tart with a crust that is too thick. While you definitely want your crust to be appreciated, you also want your filling to stand out.

BAKING/BLIND BAKING

Preheat your oven for a good 20 - 30 minutes to help reach an even heat. A baking stone is useful, particularly for *pâte brisée* based *tartes*. The even and consistent heat helps bake the crust to a lovely, crisp, well browned shell for your creation.

Remember that every oven is different. Even with convection baking in which the heat circulates throughout the oven, there can still be "hot spots" which lead to uneven browning. Use your senses – watch what's going on, smell, touch (more important with cakes, but important nonetheless) – to help you determine when your baked goods are finished.

Recipes provide guidelines for oven temps and baking times but don't be afraid to adjust those for your oven if need be.

I typically rotate and change positions of my sheet pans half way through the baking process to achieve an evenly baked product.

For *tartes* that will be filled with a precooked filling, like curd or custard, or with a filling that doesn't require additional baking, like a *ganache*, the crust must be fully baked before filling. This is called blind baking and is done by first lining the *tarte* pan with the rolled out dough, pricking it with a fork and chilling it, preferably in the freezer. This allows the

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dough to firm up and the butter to stabilize, reducing the chance for shrinkage of the dough during baking (especially important with *pâte brisée!*).

Line the chilled dough with parchment paper, fill with weights (dried rice or beans or ceramic pie weights) and bake for 12-15 minutes (oven temp will vary depending on the dough you are baking). Remove the weights and parchment and continue baking for another 5-8 minutes until the crust is golden brown, then cool before filling.

Always fill the blind baked crust as close to serving time as possible to preserve the texture of the dough. In some cases you may have to fill the baked crust several hours ahead and refrigerate it to let a particular filling set. That's OK too.

SIDE NOTE: It's usually best to eat *tartes* the day they are made (or preferably within 24 hours) – it makes sense both from the standpoint of texture and flavor. Having said that, I've eaten my share of tarts a couple of days later, and they still taste pretty darn good!

When baking a *tarte* with a very liquid or juicy filling (e.g. quiche or juicy fruits), I usually do a partial blind bake (taking it through the baking step with the weights) or even a full one to reduce the possibility of a soggy, undercooked crust. There's nothing worse than that!

PÂTE BRISÉE

Pâte brisée is the French term for “broken dough” which is made by cutting (or what some call flaking) “broken” pieces of fat into the flour, then bringing the dough together by adding a liquid, usually cold water. The amount of water needed to bring the dough together will vary depending on humidity and ambient temperature, e.g. on a cold winter's day you will most likely need the larger amount of water than you will on a hot, humid summer day.

Pâte brisée, essentially a basic pie crust, is typically unsweetened and is perfect for savory *tartes* like quiche and veggie *tartes* as well as for *tartes* in which this flakey, buttery dough contrasts so well with some naturally sweet fillings, particularly fruit.

I do add a bit of sugar to my *pâte brisée*, which contributes to the crisp texture and helps with browning without creating sweet-tasting dough. Be aware that this dough shouldn't be rolled out more than twice, for repeated rolling will make it tough.

This dough lends itself to filling with fresh fruit tossed in a little lemon juice, sprinkled with a light mix of sugar/flour and baked. Blueberries and apples are two of my favorites. Delicious!

Pâte brisée is typically baked at higher temperatures (400-425°F) than most *tarte* dough (325-350°F).

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PÂTE SUCRÉE

Pâte sucrée and its cousin *pâte sablée* are types of sweet, rich, crisp short dough used for large and small tarts, *petits fours* and cookies. They can be made using either the creaming or sanding methods of mixing. *Pâte sablée* tends to have a higher percentage of butter, making it more fragile and friable and giving it a greater “melt-in-your-mouth” texture.

There are many variants of *pâte sucrée* recipes out there. They are often mixed using the French techniques of *sablage* (working the butter into the dry ingredients with the finger tips to achieve a coarse, sandy texture) and *fraisage* (smearing the dough with the palm of the hand to bring it together).

The dough is very easy to work with, can be rerolled without sacrificing taste and texture and is suitable for almost any type of sweet tart you can imagine.

A common preparation is to fill an unbaked tart shell half way with almond cream, top it with fruit of choice and bake it; the pear almond version is a true French classic.

Use your imagination!

GUIDELINES FOR DOUGH QUANTITY FOR DIFFERENT SIZED TARTS

Whether using open *tarte* rings or removable-bottom, fluted *tarte* pans, you can use the diameter of the form, either in inches or millimeters, to help you determine how much dough you will need for your *tarte*.

For those ranging from 8” to 11” in diameter, the diameter equals the approximate number of ounces of dough you will need (e.g. you will need about 8 ounces of dough for an 8” *tarte*; 9 ounces for a 9” *tarte* and so on).

You can use a similar approach when using *tarte* rings sized in millimeters. Just take the diameter of the ring in millimeters, add 30 to it and that will be the approximate gram weight of dough you will need (e.g. for a 220 mm tart ring you will need about 250 grams of dough).

When making smaller *tartes*, the rule no longer applies since the amount of dough needed becomes less than the diameter of the ring. You just have to experiment.

In general the amount of dough needed for a 9” *tarte* will be enough for about six individual tarts (3” in diameter) or a dozen or so *petits fours tartes*.

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RECIPES

***PÂTE BRISÉE*/ FLAKY TART DOUGH**

For two 220-240 mm/9 inch *tartes* (or a two crust pie)

- 325 g / 2 ½ cups (11.5 ounces) flour (a favorite option: 215 g ap, 40 g whole wheat pastry, 40 g spelt and 30 g dark rye)
- 15 g / 1 tablespoon sugar (OPT)
- 4 g / ¾ teaspoon salt
- 227 g / 2 sticks (8 ounces) cold butter, diced (½ small dice/½ medium dice) (for extra buttery and flaky dough increase butter to 260 g/9 ounces)
- 60-120 ml / 4-8 tablespoons cold water

By hand

1. Mix flour, sugar and salt in a bowl large enough to comfortably accommodate your hands.
2. Sand in the small dice butter with your fingertips to achieve coarse crumbs.
3. Mix in the medium dice butter by flattening it between your fingertips, leaving “flakes” of butter visible in the mixture.
4. Add half of the water and mix gently with a fork until the dough starts to come together. Assess the hydration by picking up and squeezing a portion of dough. If still crumbly, add additional water, a tablespoon at a time as necessary, to bring the dough together. Do not overwork - think less is best.
5. Turn the dough onto a piece of plastic wrap, form a rough rectangle about 6”x10” then fold it in thirds. Turn the dough 90 degrees, flatten back to a rectangle and fold in thirds again.
6. Divide dough in two, wrap each in plastic wrap and chill for at least one hour or overnight before use (or pop one in the freezer for later!).

Food processor method

1. Place flour, sugar and salt in bowl of processor.
2. Add all of the diced butter and pulse briefly a few times to achieve coarse crumbs (you want to have some larger pieces of butter still visible).
3. Pour 2 tablespoons ice water through feed tube and pulse briefly, adding additional water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the dough just comes together.
4. Proceed as above in no. 5 and 6.

Pâte brisée can be refrigerated for 2-3 days or frozen, well wrapped, for up to 3 months. Thaw in the refrigerator overnight before use.

Plan ahead and double the recipe, then divide in four and stash wrapped in the freezer. It’s especially nice around the fall and winter holidays when you’re planning on baking lots of *tartes*.

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FRUIT TARTE

1. When baking a simple fruit *tarte*, plan 4-5 cups fruit for a 9" *tarte*. (Below are some measures and yields for specific fruits.) I toss my fruit with about $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar and 2 - 4 tablespoons flour. Add citrus zest and/or spices of choice if desired. Don't toss your fruit until you're ready to fill your shell. The longer it sits, the juicier it will become and may lead to a soggy bottom!
2. Heat your oven (with baking stone if using) to 425°F. Line a half sheet pan with parchment.
3. Line your chosen *tarte* ring or pan with *pâte brisée*, prick it all over with a fork and place in the freezer until your fruit is prepped and you're ready to bake.
4. Mound prepared fruit into the shell. I like to dot some butter and sprinkle some raw sugar on top. You can also top it with a crumble mixture made with equal weights flour/sugar/butter.
5. Bake for 10 minutes then reduce temperature to 400°F and continue baking until crust is nicely browned and fruit is bubbly, about 20-30 minutes more. REMEMBER – check sooner than later!!

Use a single fruit in your *tarte* or create your own fruit mixes. Some of my favorite combinations are apple/blackberry, pear/raspberry, any mixture of stone fruits and berries (e.g. cherry/blueberry, plum/raspberry, peach/blackberry).

Frozen fruit, like berries, cherries, peaches, may be used but don't thaw first! They'll get watery and soggy. Just toss them together, pop 'em into the prepared shell and in this case sprinkle your sugar/flour mixture on top. Bake immediately.

The main thing is to have fun and enjoy!!

GENERAL WEIGHTS, MEASURES AND YIELDS FOR SPECIFIC FRUITS

- Apples: one pound (3 or 4 medium) = 3 cups sliced
- Pears: one pound (4 medium) = 2 cups sliced
- Berries: 1 quart = 3.5-4 cups (a quart of blueberries weighs about 1.5 pounds)
- Strawberries: 1 quart = 4 cups sliced (a quart may weigh 1.5-2 pounds depending on size of berry)
- Plums: one pound (9 small=6 medium=5 large) = 2.5-3 cups pitted and sliced or chopped
- Cherries: one pound fresh sweet stemless cherries with pits = about 3 cups. Once pitted one pound yields ~1.5-1.75 cups.
- Peaches: one pound (2 large or 3 medium) = 2-2.25 cups peeled, chopped or sliced.

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PÂTE SUCRÉE/ SWEET DOUGH

Plenty for two 220-240 mm/9 inch tartes or galettes

- 300 g / 2 ¼ cups (10.5 ounces) flour
 - 75 g / 5 tablespoons granulated sugar (can sub in 75 g / ¾ cup confectioner's)
 - 6 g / 1 teaspoon salt
 - 170 g / 6 ounces unsalted butter, cool/diced
 - 50 g / 1 large egg
 - 5 ml / 1 teaspoon vanilla
 - 20 ml / 1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon heavy cream
1. Whisk the flour, sugar and salt together in a bowl.
 2. Sand the butter into the mixture either by hand or with a mixer (paddle on low) to coarse crumbs.
 3. Add the egg, vanilla, cream; mix with a fork to moisten, then “fraisage” by hand or blend using the paddle on low just until the dough comes together.
 4. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill at least one hour before use. This dough keeps well in the fridge for 3-4 days or in the freezer, well wrapped, for up to 3 months.

PÂTE SUCRÉE AU CHOCOLAT/ CHOCOLATE SWEET DOUGH

- 260 g / 2 cups all purpose flour
 - 42 g / 7 tablespoons or scant ½ cup Dutch processed cocoa powder
 - ½ teaspoon instant espresso powder (OPT)
 - 85 g / scant ½ cup sugar (mix of half granulated and half dark brown is nice)
 - 170 g / 6 ounces unsalted butter, cool room temperature/diced
 - 50 g / 1 large egg
 - 5 ml / 1 teaspoon vanilla
 - 5 ml / 1 teaspoon heavy cream
1. Sift flour, cocoa powder, espresso powder into a medium bowl and set aside.
 2. Blend the butter and sugar(s) in the bowl of a stand mixer with the paddle on medium-low until smooth.
 3. Add the egg, vanilla and cream and blend on low.
 4. Blend in the dry ingredients until the dough just comes together.
 5. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill at least one hour or overnight before use. This dough keeps well in the fridge for 3-4 days or in the freezer, well wrapped, for up to 3 months.

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EARL GREY GANACHE FILLING

Plenty for one 8-9" *tarte*, six to eight 3" individual *tartes* or a dozen or more *petits fours tartes*. Store any extra in a covered container in the fridge. Warm gently for use.

- 200 g / 7 ounces dark chocolate (prefer 60-64% varieties) discs (finely chopped if using block chocolate)
 - 240 g / 1 cup heavy whipping cream
 - 5 g / 1 tablespoon loose Earl Grey tea (or flavor of choice)
 - zest of two medium or one large orange
 - 28 g / 2 tablespoons unsalted butter at room temperature
1. In a medium saucepan, heat cream to a boil. Remove from heat and stir in loose tea and orange zest. Place a round of parchment directly on the surface and let infuse for 20-30 minutes.
 2. Meanwhile melt dark chocolate pieces in a double boiler over gentle heat. Once partially melted turn off heat and let the residual heat continue to melt the chocolate, stirring occasionally.
 3. Strain the cream into the melted chocolate and whisk until smooth. Whisk in butter until blended. (place double boiler back on gentle heat if needed)
 4. Pour *ganache* into blind baked *tarte* shells. Let set at room temperature for 45 – 60 minutes then refrigerate to chill thoroughly.
 5. Just before serving top with freshly whipped cream and toasted chopped nuts.

DELICIOUS CREAMS FOR BLIND BAKED TARTE SHELLS (OR TRIFLES OR CHOUX PUFFS!)

Classic *crème pâtissière* is typically used when filling fresh fruit *tartes*. I like to lighten mine with a bit of whipped cream, fill my blind baked *tarte* shell about 2/3 full and top with an assortment of fresh fruit.

A great variant on classic *crème pâtissière* and a wonderful way to incorporate more fruit into your project is to replace up to 3/4 of the milk in the recipe with fruit purée. Some interesting flavor options are red currant/raspberry; peach; pear or strawberry/rhubarb. Just purée your fruit of choice and proceed as you would for the standard cream!

Just remember, pastry cream has to chill before using it, so plan ahead. Here's a good base recipe:

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CRÈME PÂTISSIÈRE/PASTRY CREAM (for two 8-9" fresh fruit *tartes* or many profiteroles)

- 500 ml / 2 cups +1.5 tablespoons whole milk
 - 100 g / ½ cup sugar
 - 5 large egg yolks
 - 40 g / 5 tablespoons cornstarch
1. In a 2-3 quart saucepan over medium heat bring the milk and half the sugar to a boil.
 2. In a separate bowl whisk the yolks, the other half of the sugar and the cornstarch.
 3. Pour the hot milk over the egg mixture, whisking constantly, then return all to the pan on medium heat. Cook about 5 minutes, whisking constantly. The mixture will thicken and come to a boil.
 4. Scrape the cream into a clean bowl and place plastic wrap directly on the surface to eliminate air and prevent skin formation. Cool in the fridge until ready to use.
Pastry cream should generally be used within 2-3 days.

Note: when taking the chilled cream from the fridge, beat it with the paddle attachment to loosen it. Freshly whip 1/2 to 3/4 cup heavy cream and blend it into the pastry cream to lighten it. Start with about a third of it and add more as you wish

MASCARPONE CREAM

Another one of my favorite creams to make quickly is a mix of mascarpone and heavy cream, sweetened lightly with confectioner's sugar or brown sugar or honey or caramel plus a little vanilla extract. Add in lemon or lime or orange zest for an additional boost of flavor. AND you can even blend in 1/2 to 3/4 cup fruit purée to up the ante. I love lime with strawberry!

This base recipe should be enough to fill a 9" *tarte* shell or a number of individual or petite shells.

- 8 ounces/227 g mascarpone cream
- 1 cup/240 ml heavy cream
- 1.5 teaspoons vanilla extract
- a choice of ¼ cup honey or ¼ cup caramel sauce or 2-4 tablespoons confectioner's sugar to taste or ¼ cup packed/50 g brown sugar
- lemon, lime or orange zest of choice

Blend all of the above and mix with a hand mixer to thicken and achieve medium soft peaks. Don't over whip – the mascarpone can become grainy.

This will keep refrigerated for several days, after which it may require a bit of re-whipping before use.

You can also fill your tart shells with lemon curd, coconut cream or a simple chocolate *ganache*.

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SOME OF MY FAVORITE TOOLS

- Kitchenaid stand mixer
- Bench scraper
- Bowl scraper
- Small offset spatula
- Paring knife
- Silicone spatulas
- Tapered rolling pin
- Digital scale
- Nesting stainless steel bowls

SOME OF MY FAVORITE PASTRY BOOKS

- “Sweet” by Yotam Ottolenghi and Helen Goh
 - “A Good Bake” by Melissa Weller (very detailed!)
 - “Paris Sweets” by Dorie Greenspan
 - “Baking Chez Moi” by Dorie Greenspan
 - “Bouchon Bakery” by Thomas Keller and Sebastien Rouxel
 - “The Cake Bible” by Rose Levy Beranbaum (all of RLB’s books are very detailed)
 - “The Pie and Pastry Bible” by Rose Levy Beranbaum
 - “The Baking Bible” by Rose Levy Beranbaum
 - “Sweet Simplicity” by Jacques Pepin
 - “Sweeter off the Vine” by Yossi Arefi
 - “Four Star Desserts” by Emily Luchetti
 - “Pastry” by Michel Roux
 - “*Patisserie*” by Christophe Felder (available in French and English)
 - “*Les Folles Tartes*” by Christophe Felder (in French; great tart ideas)
 - “Book of Tarts” by Maury Rubin (more cool ideas for tarts!)
- Note – this was published back in 1995 – I see it’s still available on Amazon.

SOME OF MY FAVORITE RESOURCES

- bakedeco.com: a wonderful source for all things baking and pastry – tart forms, cake pans, silicone molds (Silikomart brand is my favorite), sheet pans and much more!
- honeyville.com: almond flour and other nut flours
- mandelininc.com: excellent almond paste and almond products
- www.kingarthur.com: all sorts of flours, ingredients and baking and pastry tools
- www.bobsredmill.com: nut flours, whole grains and flours, gluten free flours

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WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

For exact measures:

By weight

- 1 ounce = 28.35 grams
- 1 pound = 453.6 grams

Liquids

- 1 fluid ounce = 29.57 ml
- 1 pint = 16 fluid ounces = 0.473 liters
- 1 quart = 2 pints or 32 fluid ounces = 0.946 liter
- 1 gallon = 4 quarts = 3.785 liters

GENERAL CONVERSIONS COMMONLY USED

Weights

- 7 g = $\frac{1}{4}$ oz
- 30 g = 1 oz
- 113 g = 4 oz or $\frac{1}{4}$ lb
- 227 g = 8 oz or $\frac{1}{2}$ lb
- 454 g = 16 oz or 1 lb

Liquids

- 5 ml = 1 teaspoon
- 15 ml = 1 tablespoon
- 30 ml = 1 fluid ounce
- 60 ml = 2 fluid ounces or $\frac{1}{4}$ cup
- 120 ml = 4 fluid ounces or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
- 240 ml = 8 fluid ounces or 1 cup
- 480 ml = 16 fluid ounces or 2 cups