

Laura Weathers Pie Crust Recipe for KitchenAid Mixers

When I first started making pies, I used a recipe that called for all butter but now I use shortening (regular vegetable or butter flavored) also for a really tender crust. These directions and techniques are written for use with a KitchenAid hand mixer or stand mixer, not a food processor, that technique is a little different. The recipe makes a double crust so if you only need one, you can easily freeze half the dough for another time:

- **Tasty, Tender and Flaky Pie Crust - Butter gives great taste. Shortening and vinegar makes it tender. The combination of cold ingredients and cutting in technique makes it flaky.**

Please note that unlike a lot of pie crust recipes that have you cut the fats into the flour to resemble corn meal I do not. The small pea size is what makes the crust flake when it's rolled out. As the pie bakes, the flattened flour-coated butter nuggets melt and create steam, and the steam causes the flake. Also make sure all ingredients are cold; I even freeze my flour!

Ingredients:

2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp salt
1/2cup (1stick) cold from refrigerator unsalted butter, cut into 1/2 inch cubes 1/2cup cold shortening

About 1/4 to 1/3 cup ice-cold water- you will add a little at a time
1 Tbsp. white vinegar

Stand Mixer- flat beater (never flex edge beater)

Hand Mixer- turbo beaters

Directions:

Put the flour and salt in mixer bowl and stir to mix thoroughly. Add the cold butter cubes and shortening and mix on speed 4-6 (choose the speed you feel most in control) until the mixture starts to become mealy and forms plainly visible small pea-sized nuggets.

Slowly add the wet ingredients. To ensure a tender crust, I add the white vinegar, then a tablespoon at a time add in the ice water—a little water, mix, a little more water, mix.. Be judicious with the water. Too wet dough makes a tough crust. Wet and mix the dough until it just forms small clumps. You will probably recall, I then stop the mixer, pull some out and squeeze test it to see if it's holding together. Be careful not to over-mix the dough. If it appears dry and isn't holding, add a few additional tablespoons of water.

Dump the dough out onto a floured surface and with gentle hands gather the clumps into two balls. Flatten each, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate until chilled (about an hour) or until ready to use. Often you will find this "rest" period helps even out the moisture in slightly dry dough.

For each crust- Roll out the chilled dough, using firm strokes on a lightly floured surface or between two pieces of plastic wrap or parchment.

One last hint: be sure to roll out the dough to at least 2 inches wider than your pie pan. Then you'll have plenty leftover to drape. But be very careful not to stretch the dough as you lay it loosely into the pan. When I judge pie contests, it seems the biggest problem is the crust shrinks because the pie dough was stretched to just fit the pan. Follow my directions; you can have an award-winning pie crust of your very own!

Recipe provided by Laura Weathers.

Chocolate Chip Cookies Always On Trend

Laura Weathers, Home Economist, KitchenAid

Chocolate chip cookies were a happy “accident”. In the 1930’s, Ruth Wakefield was baking cookies for her Toll House Restaurant in Whitman, Massachusetts when on a whim, she added broken chocolate bar pieces to her cookie dough. She thought the chocolate bits would melt, instead, a classic cookie was born. Today, the Chocolate Chip Cookie is so popular that 50% of all cookies made are Chocolate Chip.

Wakefield’s recipes produced a super crispy cookie and were about the size of a quarter. Over the years, the original recipe has been tweaked and reinvented by scores of bakers to reflect personal preferences and modern food trends.

My variation uses chopped candy bits, caramels, is sweet and slightly salty, right on trend.

Take note: Choose a good quality chip if you want the signature chocolate chip bump. It is helpful to know that chocolate chips were specifically invented to make chocolate chip cookies. They are designed to resist melting. Be aware that if you make your cookies with chopped chocolate pieces, the end result may be more like chocolate puddles.

Please do not skip refrigerating the dough! Chilled dough will hold its shape better, avoiding the dreaded “cookie spread”. I think you will find that giving the ingredients time to meld with each other will intensify the flavor. Sometimes I can only chill for an hour or so, but if I can I try to chill for 1-3 days. To freeze the unbaked dough for up to two months, I roll it into a cylinder and wrap it well. Then I just slice off the cookies as I need them.

Chocolate Chip Salted Caramel Cookies

Pull out your cold ingredients so they can come to room temperature while you measure out the other ingredients. For best success, everything should be at room temperature!

Ingredients

½ cup butter (1 stick), softened- your fingertip should just feel a little give when lightly pressed on surface
½ cup shortening

½ cup granulated sugar
1 cup packed light brown sugar
2 eggs
2 tsp pure vanilla extract

1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp salt
2 ½ cups bread flour

1 ½ cups semisweet chocolate chips
1/2 c finely chopped caramel candy (about the size of mini morsels)
sea or kosher salt to sprinkle

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In the mixing bowl of your stand mixer, fitted with the flex edge or flat beater, beat shortening and butter on medium speed for 30 seconds. Add brown sugar and granulated sugar and beat until light and fluffy, about 4 minutes, scraping side of bowl, occasionally if using flat beater. Beat in eggs and vanilla until combined. In a separate bowl, mix flour, salt and soda. Slowly add the flour mixture to the wet mixture in mixer bowl. Add at about 1/2c at a time so the wet mixture can have time to absorb the dry mixture. Mix until just incorporated. Do not overbeat. Turn mixer to slowest speed and stir in chocolate chips and, caramel bits. Lightly sprinkle raw cookies with salt if desired.

Chill dough thoroughly.

Drop chilled dough by rounded tablespoons 2 inches apart onto ungreased cookie sheets. Bake for 10-12 minutes- check first batch at 8 minutes to determine time for your oven. The cookies should begin to set around the edges, be light golden brown, yet still be soft in the center. Let cookies cool on baking sheet for about 3-4 minutes before you transfer to wire racks and let cool completely. Be sure to let cookie sheets cool between loading and baking additional batches. Makes about 2 dozen cookies.

If you want to change things up a little...

Make these cookies taste like a chocolate covered cherry by omitting the caramel/salt add-in. Chop maraschino cherries- to a generous 1/4c drain well in a coffee filter lined sieve until quite dry- you do not want to add extra moisture to your dough. I often do this overnight, just leaving the draining cherries out on counter. Add the cherries when adding the chips and bake as directed.

Tweaking a recipe to your tastes

If you want to tweak a cookie recipe to your specifications here is some useful information. My word of warning here is: first choose a recipe that reads like it will be close to what you want as an end result. If you do alter a recipe only change one or two ingredients at a time. If those changes work and you still want to tweak, then try 1-2 more until you get "your perfect chocolate chip cookie".

For a Crisp Buttery Cookie look for

All butter or much larger percentage to any other fat in recipe

All or high percentage of white sugar

All-purpose flour

For a Soft Chewy Cookie look for

All shortening or lard or a significantly higher percentage shortening/oil to butter

Recipe uses melted butter

Honey, molasses or brown sugar (less white sugar if used)

Some or all bread flour

Troubleshoots for cookies

Make cookie crisper- bake completely, higher heat-375 degrees, use butter as the fat, use more white sugar than brown, small sized cookies

Make cookie chewier- less white sugar- at least 50% brown sugar, bread flour (partial or complete substitution for all-purpose flour, change baking powder to cornstarch, slightly under bake, lower heat-325 to 350 degrees, larger size cookies

Crumbly- ingredients may have been too cold (not at room temperature) or not blended well, too much flour*, may need to add moisture- 1-2 tablespoons milk OR 1 egg yolk, baked too long, did not let cookies cool long enough

Tough- do not over beat, use cake flour, too much flour*, handled too much (especially cutout cookies), to fix- try adding additional 1/4c butter or sugar to recipe.

Dough is sticky- flour may have been under measured-*add more flour (just a table spoon or 2 at a time), chill dough thoroughly, added too much moisture.

Cookie spreads too much- dough not well chilled, too low heat (check to see if oven temperature is calibrated correctly), butter was too soft, cookie sheet not cooled between batches, flour under measured*

Too dry- over baked, substituted egg whites for whole egg without adjusting the rest of the moisture in recipe- substitute part of or higher percentage of a more liquid sweetener-honey, corn syrup, molasses, brown sugar, too much flour

*Tests show that many bakers measure flour incorrectly. Give your flour a quick stir to loosen it slightly before measuring. Be sure to use measuring cups meant for dry ingredients that have straight rims for leveling. Spoon the flour into a measuring cup, rather than scooping the cup directly into the flour bin. Scooping will compact the flour, which means you end up with too much. Over fill the cup slightly and level off with a straight- edge knife or spatula. For super accuracy weigh your flour. According to the USDA one cup of flour weighs about 125 grams or do a computer search for the specific brand you are using.

Ganache 101

Laura Weathers, Home Economist, KitchenAid

Lusciously rich, uber chocolatey flavor, with a creamy, velvety texture, ganache can take sweet treats over the top.

The recipe for ganache is simple, just two ingredients, an emulsion of chocolate and heavy cream. It is the ratio of chocolate to cream that will determine the final texture and should be adjusted according to how you will be using the ganache.

Chocolate needs to be chopped finely. Semi sweet or bittersweet chocolates are typical of ganache. White and milk chocolate will tend make ganache runnier so cut down on the heavy cream accordingly.

In the glass bowl of your stand mixer bring the heavy cream just to a boil-3- 5 min at 1/2 power. The cream would just be beginning to form surface bubbles. Remove bowl from microwave and add chopped chocolate. Add 1/8 tsp salt for every cup of chocolate (optional) and any extra flavoring (like orange or peppermint extracts) if you are using one. Let stand for 3 - 5 minutes. Avoid stirring any earlier so that the ganache does not cool too quickly, making it grainy.

Stir at a slow speed using the flex edge attachment to scrape up and fully incorporate the chocolate and cream until silky smooth. If for some reason, a few bits of chocolate remain, microwave the mixture for about ten seconds, wait a minute and resume a slow stir with the flex edge until ganache is smooth.

To avoid a sugar crystal "skin" from forming, cover finished ganache with plastic wrap lying directly on the surface. Allow ganache to cool slowly at room temperature, before transferring it to the fridge, to help the chocolate and cream to bond more securely and develop a nice shine. Ganache can stay safely at room temperature for up to 2 days. Cooling too quickly can cause it to separate.

If the fat starts to separate from the heavy cream, whisk in water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the mixture is smooth and emulsified again.

Here is a simple break down of ratios. Know that these do not have to be exact measures; you can increase or decrease the chocolate to heavy cream ratio according to your own preference of consistency. Be aware that as it cools, ganache will become more solid and thicker.

Ganache ratios:

Glaze: Ratio 1:1, 1 cup chocolate to 1 cup heavy cream. Use while the ganache is still warm, the hotter the ganache the faster it flows. Pour over or dip items to create a smooth and shiny finish. Let glazed items firm up as the ganache cools to room temperature. Do not refrigerate to cool as

Filling: Ratio is 2:1, 2 cups chocolate to 1 cup heavy cream. After the chocolate and cream have combined, let the bowl cool at room temperature. Stir occasionally, so it cools evenly. When the mixture has thickened use it as a filling or frosting. For a lighter mousse-like texture, fit your stand mixer with the wire whip and beat, the more you whip, the fluffier the ganache will become. Whip up until the ganache doubles in volume.

Candy/Truffles: Ratio is 2:1, 2 cups chocolate to 1 cup heavy cream. Spread the ganache on a flat surface- like a cookie sheet (if you want to cut it into squares later) or pan (if using it as a base for bars with several layers) to cool. You could also just leave the ganache in the mixing bowl when cooling and when chilled, use a mini cookie scoop or melon-baller to scoop out ganache and roll into balls. Regardless of your intended end use, bring ganache to room temperature and then chill in the refrigerator until firm, about 8 hours.

For truffles, dust the ganache balls with powdered sugar, cocoa powder, or roll in chopped nuts.

Ganache lasts for about 3 weeks in an air tight container.

Post Purchase Video – Divinity Recipe

Laura Weathers, Home Economist, KitchenAid

Divinity in your KitchenAid Stand Mixer- As with making meringue, pick a day with low humidity. Read through recipe before you start so you understand the process before beginning.

Divinity Candy is a traditional holiday treat in many American homes. This airy confection is soft, creamy and nougat-like. Divinity purists may insist on classic vanilla, white clouds topped with a pecan half, but feel free to experiment with food colorings and other extract flavors.

Gather, measure carefully and have ready

2 cups white granulated sugar

1/3 cup water

1/3 cup light corn syrup

1/4 teaspoon salt

2 egg whites

1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract and or other flavoring of your choice

1/2 cup pecans or nuts of your choice, chopped- optional

Method:

1. Combine: sugar, water, syrup and salt into a 1 qt. heavy bottom sauce pan. Attach candy thermometer to pan. Cook over high heat stirring until sugar is dissolved. Stop stirring and continue to cook until you reach 265 degrees or if you do not have a candy thermometer test by dropping a bit of syrup in a cool glass of water and it forms hard ball.
2. WHILE syrup is cooking, into the bowl of your mixer add: egg whites and cream of tartar. Using the whisk attachment, on speed 10 beat until stiff peaks form.
3. Gradually and carefully pour cooked syrup in a thin stream into egg whites beginning on low speed and turning up to medium speed after about half of the syrup mixture has been adding to the egg whites. When well combined, beat on high speed until mixture loses some glossiness and holds its shape (this can take as little as 5 min. or up to 15). You should be able to pull up the whip and have the mixture form and hold a peak
4. Add vanilla and/ or any other flavoring extracts. Mix until just combined.
5. Working quickly, using a small ice cream scoop with a spring release or 2 spoons, drop the divinity onto parchment paper. Use one spoon to push the candy off the other. Place a pecan half onto the top of each piece of divinity. Allow to cool completely.
6. Candies can be stored in an airtight container for up to two weeks.