CUSTARD PIE

Makes one pie.
By Dennis W. Viau; modified from my mother's recipe.

Custard pie isn't exactly the healthiest dessert you can eat. It's made with lots of egg yolks. But it's delicious. When the holidays rolled around toward the end of each year, I'd ask my mother to make custard pie. Sometimes she would. I eventually figured out a recipe to make this classic pie for myself.

**Ingredients:**

**For the Pie Shell:**
- 1½ cups (8 oz./227g) all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon water
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg; room temperature
- ⅛ cup (75g) butter; room temperature

**For the Filling:**
- 2 large eggs
- 4 egg yolks
- ⅓ cup (135g) sugar
- 2 cups (475ml) whole milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ½ teaspoon fresh ground nutmeg

**Directions:**

Remove the top oven rack, if present, and arrange one rack low in the oven (you'll need the room).

In a large bowl combine the flour and sugar. In a small bowl combine the water, salt, and egg. Blend with a whisk. Add the butter and whisk until the butter is broken up into small beads. Add to the flour mixture and mix until dry enough to knead. Knead until smooth (less than a minute). Wrap and let rest 15 minutes (refrigerate if your kitchen is very warm). Heat oven to 450°F (230°C). Roll the crust to fit a standard 9-inch (23cm) pie plate. Shape the shell with high edges (the filling might be more than enough to fill the shell). Line with parchment paper or foil and fill the bottom with dry beans or other baking weights. Bake for 10 minutes. (This is called *blind baking*—baking the shell without a filling.)

While the shell is baking, combine the eggs and yolks in a food processor or with an immersion blender. Mix well. Add sugar, milk, and vanilla. Mix until smooth. Pour into a bowl (if using a food processor) and keep mixing with a whisk or rubber spatula to dissolve all the sugar that settles to the bottom.

When the shell has baked for 10 minutes, remove it from the oven and reduce the oven temperature to 350°F (175°C). Remove the lining holding the beans/weights and return the empty shell to the oven. Working quickly, open the oven door and carefully pour the custard mixture into the partially baked pie shell and sprinkle the top with nutmeg. Close the oven door and bake 35 to 45 minutes or until a thin knife inserted into the custard about an inch from the edge comes out clean. (If using a digital thermometer, the internal temperature should be 170° to 175°F (77° to 80°C).

Allow to cool completely before serving. Serve at room temperature or cold.

The **Step By Step** guide begins on the following page.
Assemble your *mise en place*. If the eggs are cold from the refrigerator you can warm them by placing them in a bowl of warm tap water for about 10 to 15 minutes.

This dough is very easy to make. Mix the flour and sugar in one bowl. Mix the water, salt, and egg in another bowl.
Add the butter to the egg mixture. They need to be at room temperature because if they are cold the butter will be more difficult to break up into small beads, as in the next step.

Use a wire whisk to break the butter into small beads, as shown above. It will make the dough easier to mix together.
Pour the egg-butter mixture into the flour mixture and start combining with a spoon or spatula.

As you combine the dough ingredients the mixture will break up. Don’t panic. This is how it is supposed to look. In the next step you’ll get your hands into it and squeeze it all together.
Start pressing the dough together with your hands to form a ball. Knead less than a minute, just until smooth, and then wrap in plastic and allow to rest for 15 minutes. If your kitchen is warm, the dough will do better if it rests in the refrigerator. When the dough is too warm the butter melts and this makes the dough oily, in which case it is more likely to tear when you roll it.

This dough is so easy to work with I don’t even use a rolling pin. I shape the crust with my hand. I’ve made this dough many dozens of times and it always turns out well. This is an easy and versatile dough.
Carefully place the dough in the pie dish and shape the shell. Make sure there are no bubbles under the bottom of the dough. You can shape the top edge with a fancy pattern if you prefer.

Carefully press a piece of parchment paper or aluminum foil into the pie shell and pour in some dry beans or pastry weights. You only need enough to weigh down the bottom as it bakes. This is called “baking blind.” This helps protect the pie crust from becoming soggy when the custard liquid is poured into it. Heat the oven to 450°F (230°C) and bake the shell for 10 minutes.
While the shell is baking, put the eggs and yolks in a food process and blend.

Add the sugar, milk, and vanilla and blend again. I use a food processor to break up the more solid parts of the eggs (the chalazae, those white cords attached to the yolks). An immersion blender would work equally as well. You can even use a standard blender.
The sugar won't thoroughly dissolve in the food processor, so I pour the contents into a bowl, getting all the sugar out of the food processor bowl, and mix with a whisk until the sugar is dissolved.

After the pie shell cooks for 10 minutes, remove it from the oven, reduce the oven temperature to 350°F (175°C). Remove the beans (weights) and lining and return the shell to the oven. Carefully pour the custard mixture into the shell. This is why you removed one of the racks. You need room inside the oven. Sprinkle the nutmeg on the surface and close the oven door. Bake 35 to 45 minutes.
The internal temperature of the custard should reach 170°F to 175°F (77°C to 80°C). My filling is over 180° here, plenty cooked enough.

Allow the pie to cool on a rack until thoroughly cooled. It can be chilled in the refrigerator for a few hours if you wish to serve it cold.
If you have a torch you can use it to brown the surface. Or use your oven's broiler, but watch it closely.

Here is the custard pie, slightly browned, and ready for serving. When I was a child this pie was never served with ice cream or topping, but feel free to garnish it any way you like. This pie always brings back fond memories of my childhood.
Conclusion:

Although this pie was typically prepared in my childhood home for Christmas, and sometimes Thanksgiving (I was not fond of pumpkin pie), I believe it is appropriate any time of the year, whether for special occasions or to share with family and friends or at a barbecue or picnic. It could be topped with fresh whipped cream or served with ice cream on the side, or with a generous helping of seasonal berries as an accompaniment. One point to keep in mind: This pie does not travel well. Custard has a delicate texture. If you are bringing it to the home of family or friends carry it safely.