

CHICKEN POT PIES

Makes 6 to 8 single-serving pies

By Dennis W. Viau; modified from several recipes.

I grew up with chicken pot pies. However, my mother bought them pre-made and frozen. One important ingredient for me was a bottom crust. Many pot pies are made with only a top crust. If my pot pie didn't have a bottom crust I felt cheated. So for this recipe I made enough pastry dough to give each pie a top *and* a bottom crust. I used small 5-inch (13cm) pie pans.



Ingredients:

For the Pie Shells:

4 tablespoons water

1 teaspoon salt

4 eggs; at room temperature

1½ cups (340g) butter; at room temperature

6 cups (30 ounces/850g) all purpose flour

For the Filling:

2 large chicken breasts (½ to ¾ pound/227 to 340g each)

2 tablespoons olive oil for frying

1 medium onion

2 large carrots

2 large stalks celery

4 tablespoons butter

½ cup (2.5 ounces/64g) all purpose flour

2 cups (475ml) chicken stock; preferably homemade

¼ cup (60ml) heavy cream

½ teaspoon thyme

1 cup (136g) frozen peas

3 tablespoons dry sherry

2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian (flat leaf) parsley

Salt and pepper to taste

1 egg for making an egg wash

Directions:

To Prepare the Pastry:

In a large bowl whisk together the water, salt, and eggs. Add 1½ cups (340g) softened butter and whisk until the butter is broken up into small beads. Add the flour and combine with a large spoon until the mixture is dry enough to knead. Transfer to a work surface and knead, pressing together, to form a smooth dough. Cover with plastic and set aside until needed.

To Prepare the Pie Filling:

Slice the chicken breasts lengthwise into two broad slices. Heat oil in a skillet and add the chicken. Sauté over medium heat until lightly browned. Turn and continue until the meat is just cooked through. Remove from the pan and set aside. Leave the oil and fond (the brown bits) in the skillet.

Dice the onion, celery, and carrot into ¼-inch (1cm) pieces, about the same size as the peas. Cook in the skillet until tender, 4 to 5 minutes, and then transfer to a bowl and set aside.

Cube the chicken into bite-size morsels, slightly larger than the vegetables. Add to the cooked vegetables.

Melt the 4 tablespoons butter in the skillet. Add the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour and stir, cooking the flour 1 to 2 minutes. It will be lumpy. Add the chicken stock and stir until the flour is broken up and incorporated into the stock. Add the peas and simmer 2 to 3 minutes over low heat. The sauce will thicken. Remove from the heat and stir in the cream.

Add the cooked chicken and vegetables, parsley, sherry, and thyme. Adjust for salt and pepper.

Heat oven to 400°F (200°C) with a rack in the lower third of the oven. Combine the 1 egg with a teaspoon of water to make an egg wash. Divide the dough in 6 or 8 equal-sized sections, enough for your available small pie pans. Divide each piece into a $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ portion. Roll the larger portion into a bottom crust and gently ease into a pie pan. There should be plenty of dough extending beyond the edge of the pan. Spoon enough filling into the pie shell to fill it to the top. Roll the smaller portion to form a top crust. Brush the edges of the bottom crust with egg wash and press the top crust into place, sealing around the edges with your fingers. Trim with a knife and then press the tines of a fork into the edge all the way around to decorate. Pierce the top crust in 3 or 4 places to create vents. Brush the tops lightly with egg wash.

Arrange the pies on a lined (foil or parchment paper) baking sheet and bake 30 to 40 minutes until lightly browned and the filling mixture begins to show signs of boiling up through the vents (or out the sides). During the last few minutes of baking the pies can be browned lightly under the broiler. Watch them closely.

Cool 10 minutes and serve by removing pie from its pan and placing in a shallow bowl.

STEP-BY-STEP

1



The plastic bag holds flour. I buy flour in the 25-pound (11 $\frac{1}{3}$ kg) sack and divide into 2-pound (907g) portions for making bread later. I simply removed 2 ounces from this bag to have the 30 ounces (850g) I needed for this recipe. The butter is soft, at room temperature. The eggs are at room temperature as well.

2



These are the ingredients I'm using for the filling. I am using homemade chicken stock (upper-left, behind the pepper mill), but you can use the broth available in the store. Choose a low-sodium brand.

3



To start the pastry for the pie crust, combine the egg, water, and salt, mixing well with a whisk.

4



Add the room-temperature butter and break it up into small beads with the whisk. This is why the butter needs to be warm and soft. This step would be impossible with a block of butter that is cold from the refrigerator.

5



Add the flour and begin combining. It won't come together into a ball of dough in this step. That will happen in the next steps. Mix the ingredients together until they are dry enough to knead.

6



Combine the dough ingredients until the mixture is dry enough to knead with your hands. Transfer the mixture to a clean surface and begin squeezing the dough together and kneading it until smooth. Don't overwork it. Your warm hands will melt the butter and make the dough oily.

7



Here is my ball of dough. This came together well. Wrap this in plastic and set it aside until needed. If it is a particularly warm day, or your kitchen is very warm, store in a cool place or in the refrigerator.

8



Cut each chicken breast into thin slices by cutting with the knife parallel to the cutting board. Thin slices will make them easier to cook quickly.

9



Heat the olive oil (use “pure” olive oil rather than “extra virgin,” as the pure oil has a higher smoke point) and sauté the chicken breast slices until cooked through and lightly browned. Remove from the skillet and set aside.

10



While the chicken meat is cooking, chop the vegetables. The pieces should be about the same size as the peas. The easiest way to do this is to cut the carrot and celery into long strips, then cut across into a dice.

11



Similarly, chop the onion in a dice that is about the same size as the peas.

12

Sauté the vegetables in the same skillet used for the chicken. You don't need to clean the pan. The moisture will deglaze the pan, releasing the fond (brown bits) from the bottom, and this will add more flavor to your pie filling. Cook for only 2 to 3 minutes for an *al dente* texture to the vegetables.

13

Cube the cooked chicken into pieces that are about twice the size of the peas. Larger pieces of chicken inside the pie will add to the appeal.

14

Give the skillet a quick wipe with a paper towel and melt the 4 tablespoons butter in it over medium heat. Add the flour and stir. It will lump, but that's okay. Cook the flour for a minute or two.

15

Add the chicken stock, return to the heat, and stir, stir, stir, to break up the flour into a smooth mixture. Add the thyme, peas, and sherry. Cook for a few minutes, then remove from the heat and stir in the cream.

16



Add the cooked vegetables, chicken, and chopped parsley. Mix and taste for salt and pepper. At this point some people like to add a little chicken bouillon for more flavor, but I prefer not to. It's up to you. Be mindful that most bouillon is high in salt, so add the bouillon before adjusting for salt and pepper.

17



Separate a portion of dough, about the size of your fist or a little smaller, and roll out into a circle that is larger than the individual pie pans you are using. I use a small Italian roller that works better for little pastries like this rather than using my large 18-inch rolling pin.

18

Arrange the dough into the pie plate, easing the excess around the sides.

19

Fill the pie shell with filling, just enough to rise a little above the rim. Combine the egg with about a tablespoon of water, mixing well, to make an egg wash. Brush a little of the egg wash around the edges to help the top crust adhere when sealed into place.

20



Roll another circle of dough, slightly smaller, and place on top, pressing around the edges to seal. You can use the tines of a fork to stitch the edges together and give the pie a decorative edge. Finally, pierce the top in 3 or 4 places to create vents.

21



I only have four small pie pans, but I had enough filling for at least six pies. So I used two small ceramic bowls. Although it might be a little difficult to distinguish, look closely at the pie in the center front. For that one I worked the top dough piece longer, until it became oily from the butter melting because of the warmth of my hands. It doesn't have the same eye appeal as the others.

Heat oven to 400°F (200°C).

Arrange the pies on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Brushing the top of each pie with egg wash (which I failed to do for these photographs) will help them to brown more quickly in the oven. You only need to cook and brown the pie shell and heat the filling. The filling ingredients are already cooked.



This is what happens if you leave the pies in the oven too long to brown the crusts. The filling starts to boil and it oozes out of the pies. Using egg wash would have helped them brown more quickly, avoiding this mess.

The pies need to bake about 30 minutes. Allow to cool 10 minutes and then serve.



Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning, I grew up with chicken pot pies. Homemade pies are, of course, better than any pie my mother bought frozen in the store because these are made with fresh ingredients. I had planned to share these with friends, but when I tasted the first one I changed my mind. Over several days I ate them all. Because I grew up with these, chicken pot pies are comfort food for me.