

CHICKEN AND SPINACH PIE

Makes 1 pie

By Dennis W. Viau; inspired by a photograph in
The Renaissance of Italian Cooking by Lorenza de'Medici

Chicken and Spinach Pie looks fantastic, like you were cooking all day, but you almost can't go wrong. If your first thought at seeing the word *pie* was *I can't make pie crust*, don't turn away. You make this pie crust with phyllo dough sheets, available frozen in grocery stores. There is no mixing, no kneading, no rolling, and no hoping. The crust comes out perfectly flaky every time. I've used this method many times for making other savory pies.



Ingredients:

1 15-ounce (425g) container of ricotta cheese; drained if wet
10 to 12 (280g to 340g) ounces fresh spinach
(Optional: ½ cup (2 ounces /60g) pine nuts, lightly toasted)
(Optional: 3 ounces (85g) sliced mushrooms, sautéed in butter)
2 cloves garlic; minced or crushed through a garlic press
1 large chicken breast, raw (about 10 ounces/300g); cubed (or substitute dark meat)
1 tablespoon butter or olive oil
1 package (1 pound/450g) phyllo dough (sometimes seen as *fillo* for *filo*); thawed
¾ cup (175ml) clarified butter; melted
¼ pound (115g) sliced prosciutto; cut into small pieces
¼ cup (1 ounce/30g) grated Parmesan or Romano cheese
⅛ to ¼ teaspoon fresh ground nutmeg
2 large eggs
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

If the ricotta seems wet, spread on paper towels and press with more towels to absorb moisture. Set aside. Wash the spinach, remove and discard the stems. Put about ¼ cup water in a large cooking pot and bring to a boil. Place the leaves in the pot, cover, and cook about 5 minutes, turning with tongs halfway through the cooking time. Drain in a colander and allow to cool until comfortable to handle. Using your hands (or a potato ricer), press out the excess liquid and then chop the spinach into 1-inch (2.5cm) sections. If using pine nuts, place them in a dry skillet over medium heat and toast until they change color, 3 to 5 minutes. If using sliced mushrooms, sauté in butter until tender.

Place the garlic and chicken in a skillet with the one tablespoon of butter or olive oil and sauté over medium heat until just cooked. Do not brown. In a large bowl, combine the ricotta cheese, cooked chicken, spinach, (optional pine nuts and/or mushrooms), prosciutto, Parmesan (or Romano) cheese, nutmeg, one egg, salt and pepper. Mix well with a spoon or your hands. Set aside.

Make the top crust first. Place a sheet of phyllo dough on a work surface and, using a pastry brush, carefully brush the surface lightly with melted clarified butter. Place another sheet on top, position it at a different angle to cross the grains, and brush again with butter. Continue layering phyllo dough until half the package is used. Do not butter the top layer. Press the springform pan ring onto the dough to make an impression. Trim to this line. Wrap this crust in plastic and set aside.

Assemble the bottom crust the same way as above, but do not trim. Carefully place the layered pastry into a greased 9-inch (24cm) springform pan, evenly arranging the excess along the sides. Spoon the filling

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mixture into the pastry shell, leveling the top. Heat your oven to 350°F (175°C).

Place the top crust on the pie. Beat the remaining egg and brush lightly onto the edges of the crust. Fold over the edges to seal around the top. Brush the entire top surface with beaten egg.

Bake about 1 hour. Serve hot, removing from the pan before cutting.

The step-by-step photos were removed. See the video for the preparation.