

SHORT PASTRY

The original recipe for “Short Paste for Fruit Pies” appears in Mrs. A. L. Webster’s *The Improved Housewife* (1844). The recipe, with commentary, can be found in Keith Stavely and Kathleen Fitzgerald’s *Northern Hospitality: Cooking by the Book in New England* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011).

When we first made this shortcrust pastry, we were skeptical about the addition of lard to the dough. We were novices at cooking with lard, and hadn’t yet baked anything that included this—to us—new ingredient. Would the baked crust taste, um, piggy? Our first bite of this crust made us into instant converts. We made this note in our cooking file: “This is the most delicious plain crust ever!”

MAKES 2 9-INCH PIE CRUSTS

4 cups sifted all-purpose flour, plus 3-4 teaspoons for dusting the dough

1 tablespoon sugar

¾ cup (6 ounces) lard

¼ cup cold milk

1½ sticks (6 ounces) cold, unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces

Stir the sugar into the flour. Then rub the lard into the flour with your fingers until the mixture resembles coarse meal.

Add cold milk, about a tablespoon at a time, to the flour and mix just until the dough forms a loose ball.

Lightly flour a pastry board. Coat your hands with flour, gather up the dough, knead lightly until the dough comes together, and roll it out on the board.

Dot the dough with a quarter of the butter, sprinkle flour over the dough and rolling pin, and roll out the dough until the butter is incorporated—lumps of butter will be visible in the dough. Continue dotting the dough with butter, sprinkling on flour, and rolling quickly until all the butter is used up. If the dough becomes warm or the butter soft, refrigerate both for 10 to 15 minutes and continue.

If you are making a fruit pie, leave the crust about half an inch thick. A thick crust for fruit pies prevents the fruit syrup from bleeding through the bottom of the pie as it bakes. For other uses, roll as desired.

Chill the rolled pie crust well, about 30 minutes in the refrigerator, before baking.