

## **Caramelised Onion, Bacon, Goat's Cheese and Sundried Tomato Tart**

The essential part of any pie is the pastry. From years of watching my grandmother and mother battle away in the kitchen to make the perfect pastry, I've learnt that it is as much about technique as ingredients. The following recipe allows you to try out two different pastries, but don't worry, both taste equally good.

### **The recipe**

Serves 6-8

You will need

A deep fluted flan ring about 23 x 4cm deep (9 x 1 1/2 inches)

### **Shortcrust Pastry**

#### **Ingredients**

##### **Shortcrust Pastry Case**

225g (8oz) plain flour

1/2 tsp salt

1 level tsp mustard powder

50g (2oz) lard

50g (2oz) butter, unsalted and chilled

1/4 tsp cayenne pepper

2 tblsp approx of cold water

##### **Shortcrust Pastry Filling**

3 large red onions, peeled and sliced thinly

30g (1oz) unsalted butter

1 tblsp clear honey

1/2 tsp fresh ground black pepper

1 Thai chilli pepper, de-seeded and finely diced

100ml (3 1/2 fl oz) of red wine

2 large fresh eggs

1 egg yolk

425 ml (3/4 pint) of single cream

175g (6oz) goat's cheese log, cut into circular slices

6 sundried tomatoes in oil, cut into quarters

1/2 tsp paprika

225g (8oz) smoked rindless streaky bacon

black pepper

##### **Shortcrust Pastry Instructions**

Sieve the flour, salt, mustard powder and cayenne together into a bowl. Cut the fats into cubes and rub them lightly into the flour using the fingertips, lifting up the mixture to keep it cool and airy. Mix until you obtain a breadcrumb consistency. Make a well in the centre of the mixture and add the water gradually, using just enough to produce a stiff but not sticky dough. Wrap and place into the fridge for 30 minutes to rest. Pre-heat the oven to 200degrees C/400 degrees F/Gas mark 6 and lightly grease the pie/flan dish. When ready, roll out the pastry to a circle, approx 25.5 cm (10 ins) in diameter on a lightly floured surface. Allow an extra 5mm (1/4 in) overhang in case of shrinkage. Prick the base of the pastry with a fork to allow any air to escape.

Then line with a piece of greaseproof paper, scatter with kidney beans/ceramic baking beans to prevent the pastry from rising. Place into the oven and blind bake for around 12 minutes. When cooked, remove greaseproof paper and beans. The pastry is now ready for the filling.

Heat the butter and add the sliced onions. Cook gently for 5 - 6 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the honey, black pepper, chilli pepper and stir. Cover and cook for a further 3 minutes. Remove the lid and add the red wine. Bring to the simmer and cook until the wine has almost evaporated, leave to cool. In a separate bowl mix together eggs, egg yolk, black pepper and cream. Grill the bacon briefly (around 4 minutes) - don't crispen. Place the onions evenly onto the base of the tart. Cover with the egg and milk mix. Lay the goat's cheese in the tart, followed by slices of bacon, and sundried tomato quarters. Dust the tart with paprika and place into the oven for 30-35 minutes, or until set and golden.

### **Puff pastry**

Making your own puff pastry in traditional style is time consuming, but it's extremely satisfying to see your hundred, if not thousand, layer achievement.

#### **Puff Pastry Ingredients**

240g (8oz) plain flour  
240g (8oz) butter pinch of salt  
120g-135g (4-4 1/2oz) of cold water  
2 tsp lemon juice, optional

#### **Puff Pastry Filling**

3 large red onions peeled and sliced thinly  
30g (1oz) unsalted butter  
1 tblsp clear honey  
1/2 tsp fresh ground black pepper  
1 Thai chilli pepper, de-seeded and finely diced  
100ml (3 1/2 fl oz) of red wine  
175g (6oz) goat's cheese log, cut into circular slices  
225g (8oz) smoked rindless streaky bacon

#### **Puff Pastry Instructions**

Sieve the flour and salt into a bowl. Make a well in the middle of the flour and add the lemon juice, stir with a knife and add enough water to make an elastic dough. Place on to a floured surface and knead gently until the dough is smooth and does not stick to the fingers. Wrap the butter loosely in some clingfilm and squash it flat into a rectangle. Roll out the dough so that it is just a bit larger than the butter. Place the butter on the pastry and fold into three. Roll the pastry out again into a rectangle approx 20 x 30 cms (8 x 12 ins). Lengthways fold one third towards the middle of the pastry and then bring the remaining third right over so that you have three layers of the dough. Wrap in cling film and place in the fridge for 20 minutes. Repeat this process 5 times - resting the dough in the fridge for 20 minutes each time.

#### **To create the puffs**

Roll out the pastry and cut into 12 cm x 12 cm squares. Taking one square and using a small knife, mark out a smaller square, 1 cm in from the outside edge. Cut out the shape, but leaving the opposite corners attached. Repeat with remaining squares. Lightly egg wash the pastry square and lift the corners of the pastry and cross to the other side. Carefully line up the edges and place on to a non-stick tray. Place the filling - caramelised onion, goat's cheese and bacon only - in the centre. Cook in a preheated oven at 200 degrees C for 12 minutes.

### **Alan's tips**

The basic rule of thumb with pastry is half lard to half butter. The lard acts as shortening as does the butter, which also adds flavour.

It may sound strange but when you're rolling pastry your stance is important. With a straight back and legs wide slightly apart you are evenly balanced and can roll your pastry evenly too.

Only push the pastry forward when you're rolling it. Turn it a quarter and then repeat until you have a nice round circle. When you're ready to move it you can simply wrap it around your rolling pin and move it anywhere.

### **The Science**

#### **Short pastry ... and keeping it that way**

The two big top tips in making pastry are: keep everything really cold, and handle the pastry as little as possible. It's all to do with keeping the pastry tender by reducing the amount of gluten development. Shortening in pastry is literally all about keeping the gluten short. If the protein molecules in the flour get the chance to develop, they form gluten - a tangled mass of molecules - which will make your pastry tough. Separating the molecules by adding some fat helps to reduce the amount of tangling and the size of the lumps of gluten that can form, and so helps keep the pastry tender. So use plain flour, not strong or bread flour, because it contains less gluten. And don't handle the pastry too much - as that just increases the amount of gluten development. All solid fats (lard, margarine and butter) will do this job of separating the gluten lumps, and so will all shorten pastry. But if the fat melts, it soaks into the flour and won't keep the gluten molecules apart anymore, so the pastry becomes tougher. That's why you need to keep everything cold when you make pastry - to keep the fats solid and stop that gluten development. So it really is worth using ice cold water, a cold mixing bowl and utensils, and trying to get your hands as cold as possible. I have crazy hot hands - and should be kept out of the room if pastry is being made!

#### **Lemon**

You have to handle puff pastry, so much it's inevitable that it warms up a bit, so some of the fat melts and loses its power to shorten the pastry as it's the perfect environment for gluten to develop. A few drops of lemon in the pastry mix helps to prevent this because acid inhibits gluten development. Or you could use half self-raising flour and half plain flour, as self-raising flour contains less protein, hence gluten, than plain.

#### **Folding**

The repeated folding and rolling process creates hundreds and hundreds of layers of pastry separated by layers of butter. In the heat of the oven, air and water vapour expand and puff the layers apart, creating that characteristic puff pastry. The oven needs to be really hot to do this - so make sure it's pre-heated.

#### **Baking Blind**

Baking the pastry case 'blind' (cooking it before the filling is added) seems like a hassle, but it allows the pastry to cook before you put in the filling. If you don't do this, too much of the pie filling soaks into the bottom before the pastry has had a chance to cook, and you'll get a soggy bottomed pie. The kidney/ceramic baking beans help to stop the base from rising.

**Caramelised Onions**

The fabulous sweetness you get from onions is partly due to starch molecules breaking down to become sugars. But it's helped by the series of reactions that are kicked off when you cut into the onion. Some of the chemicals produced, when cooked for long enough, eventually turn into a complex molecule that's about 60 times sweeter than a molecule of table sugar. It's really worth the wait when cooking onions to make sure you get the full force of this sweet molecule.

**Eggs**

It's the eggs that make the tart set, but this won't start to happen until they get to over 66 degrees C. Pre-heat the oven at a high temperature so the eggs get cooking quickly and don't have much time to soak into the base.

**Sundried Tomatoes**

As their name suggests, these tomatoes are literally dried out in the sun. This drives off lots of water and concentrates the flavours. Bacteria need water to survive, and with so much water loss, they find it harder to grow on the sundried tomatoes - which is why they keep for ages.