

Pastry Classics

December 9 is National Pastry Day. Pastry is a broad term used to name a specific type of dough, and it also refers to a specific type of baked goods. They can be savory or sweet. Pastry dough is used to make tarts, quiche, and pies. The other type of pastries that you eat with your morning coffee include croissants, danishes, strudels, eclairs, and many more.

There are many types of pastry doughs, and pastries that vary from regions and even countries. All pastries contain flour, liquid, which is usually milk or water, salt, and a fat, such as butter, shortening, oil, or lard. Some pastry recipes also include eggs and sugar. Crossaints use yeast, but generally, steam and air are the leaveners for pastries. The ways the ingredients are combined and the ratio of ingredients used give the pastry doughs different characteristics so that we can distinguish between the different types.

I encourage you to try making pastry dough from scratch at least once. If you decide the homemade doughs aren't worth the effort, there are many varieties of frozen and refrigerated ready-made pastry doughs, or you can even go to the bakery and get the pastries that are ready to eat.

Before embarking on your pastry-making journey, let's learn about six basic types of pastry doughs. The two main types of classification are: non-laminated pastry, where solid fat is cut into the flour, or added as melted or liquid oil; or laminated pastry, where solid fat is repeatedly folded into the dough.

Unleavened non-laminated pastries include choux pastries, éclairs, and pie dough. Leavened non-laminated pastries include brioche. Examples of unleavened laminated dough include phyllo dough and puff pastry dough. An example of leavened laminated dough includes the croissant.

Puff pastries are laminated pastries. Puff pastry is made from layers of butter and dough that get rolled together and layers are overlapped approximately 6 to 8 times. When the dough is baked, the air that was trapped between the layers expands and the pastry rises to develop the flaky, airy texture characteristic of puff pastry. If made correctly, puff pastry will double or triple in size. It takes a lot of time and effort. This type of dough works well for apple pastry rolls, and the technique used to make it is similar to how croissants are made. Croissants are made by adding yeast and egg to basic puff pastry recipes.

Phyllo (Filo) pastry dough is made using the laminated method. Phyllo is made from a combo of flour, water, salt, and some oil. The dough differs from both puff and shortcrust due to its low amount of fat. This results in very thin, flaky layers that can easily rip or tear when handled. It is used to make baklava and savory creations such as spanakopita (aka Greek Spinach Pie), made from layers of dough with a spinach and feta cheese filling. On the plus side, phyllo's popularity can be attributed to its high versatility that allows it to be folded, rolled, ruffled, or otherwise manipulated into almost any shape.

Typically used with dry fillings, layers of phyllo dough can be wrapped around your filling of choice and then brush with butter before baking. If you are a beginner experimenting with this type of pastry for the first time, be sure to work at a speed that ensures it stays moist as you create your final product.

Flaky pastry dough is the simplest of all. This dough is great for making sweet and savory pies, quiche, sausage rolls, and turnovers. It benefits from a hands-off attitude because the flakiest of doughs is the result of pea-sized chunks of butter and gentle handwork. Overworking this dough will yield tough and crumbly pastry, which is the last thing you want in a homemade pie.

One of the most common and easy-to-prepare pastries is a shortcrust pastry. It is made from butter, flour, and just enough water for binding. Once combined, the ingredients are briefly kneaded, refrigerated, and then rolled to line the bottoms and tops of pies, quiches, tarts, and other favorites. Notably bulkier than its puff pastry counterpart, shortcrust pastry's texture is crumbly rather than flaky, allowing it to stand up to both wet and dry fillings.

Choux pastry is a French dough made from flour, butter, and water – with the addition of eggs for extra leavening and richness. This creates a crispy outer shell and hollow interior. Choux pastry is usually filled with piped creams using pastry bags to make decadent desserts such as éclairs and cream puffs.

Hot water crust pastry is best used for making meat pies and dishes requiring a more formidable crust that can hold saucy or dense ingredients. This crust is made with butter that is melted in a high concentration of heated water. The result is a versatile pastry that is easy to work with and shape. This pastry is not as well-known.

For the best results, take advantage of special pastry-making tools and equipment available, such as a pastry blender or cutter. A pastry chef's favorite, this handheld tool features parallel metal wires that easily and efficiently cut butter into flour, creating a perfect dough without making a mess on your hands.

So that's it, now you know the different types of pastries and their uses when baking. Which dough would be your top choice? Perfect the art of pastry-making with your very own culinary masterpieces!

(Sources: www.craftybaking.com; www.lionsdeal.com; www.masterclass.com)

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