

In season, strawberries are so sweet and tender they need nothing to coax them into deliciousness.

They stand alone on the yummy stage, and no amount of culinary fussing is going to make them shine any brighter. But I like to bring a few friends along for the ride, just to keep things interesting: a little buttery crust to add structure, a dab of creaminess to smooth the journey on your tongue, and a wisp of lemon and a dash of basil to perk the players up.

Procedure for the crust

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C). Roll the dough into a rough 11-inch (28-cm) square. Line a 9-inch (23-cm) square tart pan with the dough and trim any excess that extends beyond the rim of the tart pan with a sharp paring knife. Dock the bottom of the dough. Freeze it for 20 minutes.
2. Line the tart shell with parchment and fill it with pie weights or dried beans. Bake for 15 minutes. Remove the pie weights and parchment and bake for 10 minutes more, or until the bottom of the crust has started to brown and the dough is baked through. Set it aside to cool completely.

Simple Tart Dough (page 21) * one batch see below

strawberries, hulled and sliced into eighths 1 pint 340 g
granulated sugar ¼ cup 50 g
zest of 1 lemon
minced fresh basil ½ teaspoon 1 g

creme fraiche 1 cup 240 ml
confectioners' sugar 2 tablespoons 12 g
vanilla bean paste ½ teaspoon 2.5 ml

strawberries 25
Fruit Glaze (page 37) 1 batch * see below
heavy cream 1 cup 240 ml
confectioners' sugar 3 tablespoons 17 g

Procedure for the strawberry filling

In a medium mixing bowl, stir together the sliced strawberries, granulated sugar, lemon zest, and basil. Allow the berries to macerate for 15 to 20 minutes, long enough that the juices run freely and the sugar has melted completely.

Procedure for the crème fraîche filling

In another bowl, stir together the creme fraiche, confectioners' sugar,

and vanilla until smooth and combined.

Assembly

1. Spoon the creme fraiche mixture into the pie shell and smooth it into an even layer along the bottom using an offset spatula. Ladle the macerated strawberries and their juice evenly on top of the creme fraiche, working to keep the layer relatively level because it will act as a base upon which the whole strawberry structure will stand.
2. Cut the green ends off the whole strawberries. With a pastry brush, paint each strawberry with the fruit glaze, then arrange in neat rows.
3. In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment (or by hand for a nice workout), whisk together the cream and confectioners' sugar just until you achieve stiff peaks. (Be careful not to overbeat the cream!) Transfer the whipped cream to a serving bowl so your guests can dollop at will.
4. Serve the pie immediately or refrigerate it until you're ready for it.

A NOTE FROM THE SWEETIE PIE

Whipped cream is a lovely addition to the top of any pie. It often even finds a way to nestle inside the filling. And if you've made your share of whipped cream, no doubt you've whipped it right over the edge from pie friendly to buttery toast topping at least once. Here's a trick to save your beautiful cream. If you've overwhipped it to the point that it is slightly curdled and buttery, add about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (60 ml) heavy cream to the mess and whisk. The damage, assuming you've not gone too far, will reverse. You're welcome

*Simple Tart Dough

this is my go-to dough for anything that needs simplicity and texture. It is akin to the French classic *pâte brisée*, but with so much more flavor (in my not-so-humble opinion). The inclusion of sweetened condensed milk might have you thinking that this is a sweet dough, but it's not. Instead, the milk adds an underlying caramel richness without making a sweet crust.

all-purpose flour, cold 4 cups 500 g
unsalted butter, cut into small pieces and chilled
2 cups 480 g
salt 1 teaspoon 6 g
sweetened condensed milk $\frac{1}{3}$ cup 75 ml

1 egg, at room temperature, lightly beaten

Makes 2½ pounds (1.2 kg) dough, enough for 3 to 4 (8- to 9-inch/20- to 23-cm) tarts or 12 to 16 mini tarts

1. In the bowl of a food processor fitted with the blade attachment, pulse together the flour, butter, and salt until the mixture resembles cornmeal.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the condensed milk and egg. While pulsing, slowly pour this into the flour until the dough just comes together.
3. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and gently turn over a few times until it is smooth, the dry ingredients have been completely integrated, and the dough holds together. Take care not to overwork it.
4. Shape the dough into a loose circle, cover it with plastic wrap, and allow to rest in the refrigerator for at least 20 minutes.

Fruit Glaze

fruit tarts in pastry shops have the added glitz of getting dosed with professional pastry glaze; this keeps them shiny and succulent, even after hours in the cooler. But you don't need to shell out a ton of money or scour the internet for a specialized source for pastry glaze. You can go old-school and use the original glazing material: apricot preserves. The flavor is mild enough that it won't distract from the fruit it's coating.

Makes approximately ¼ cup (60 ml)

smooth apricot preserves ¼ cup 60 ml

1. Simply stir together the preserves and 2 tablespoons (30 ml) water in a small saucepan over low heat until the preserves have melted and the mixture is smooth.
2. Brush this on your fruits with a small pastry brush and sit back and enjoy the compliments.