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LIFE & WORKFOOD & DRINKA LITTLE SOMETHING SWEET

This Easy Thanksgiving Dessert Recipe Is an Elegant Alternative to Apple Pie

For the holiday or any day, opt for the effortless chic of the pear tarte Tatin. Frozen puff pastry makes it a no-brainer.



UPPER CRUST Subtly spiced with cardamom and ginger, this simple dessert elevates the usual lineup of holiday pies. PHOTO: EMMA FISHMAN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, FOOD STYLING BY TYNA HOANG, PROP STYLING BY CATHERINE PEARSON

By Aleksandra Crapanzano

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COME AUTUMN'S harvest, apples take pride of place in American desserts, and I'm not one to argue that. But what of the humble pear?

It arrives a little later in the season and is often overlooked, particularly in baking. But pears have a delicate sweetness that softens the blow of the first frost, offering a fragrance that's mild but quietly intoxicating. Baked, they lend themselves to spicing, particularly with cardamom and ginger. While I wouldn't recommend a pear pie—the fruit would disintegrate, steamed under a pie crust—pears are ideal in a tarte Tatin, which cooks far more quickly, particularly when made with puff pastry.

Walk into the Grand Épicerie, the supermarket section of the famed department store Le Bon Marché in Paris, and you'll see ready-made puff pastry being scooped up by savvy Parisians

unapologetically looking for a shortcut. Whether for hors d'oeuvres, savory tarts or sweet ones, puff pastry is ideal when time is in short supply. Here in the U.S., it's easy to find good frozen options.

Made with thin layers of buttery dough, puff pastry does exactly what it promises: It puffs up when baked and forms a rich yet light crust that pairs beautifully with pears. I use a Le Creuset tarte Tatin dish, but a good, heavy cast-iron skillet works well, too. Simply sauté pears in a little butter and sugar, drape them with a round of puff pastry and stick the skillet in the oven for 20-30 minutes, then invert the tart onto a plate so the pears face up. It really is that easy.

Puff pastry is ideal when time is in short supply.

You want a variety of pear that will hold up to heat. Bartlett, Bosc and Anjou are good choices. Pick fruit that is just short of ripe and doesn't yield too readily when lightly pressed. Cut the pears into slices, about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch thick. Or, use the tiny Forelle pears and merely halve them.

For the puff pastry, I use a brand called Dufour, which is made with butter. It's available in many supermarkets, and if yours isn't among them, it's worth ordering online. Other brands simply don't match its buttery richness. You may either leave the pastry to thaw overnight in the fridge or on a floured countertop at room temperature for one hour. Puff pastry must be baked in a hot, fully preheated oven, as the high temperature helps it puff. And, while it is quick to bake, it is also quick to go soft and so must be made within a few hours of serving. For best results, serve this tarte Tatin hot or warm from the oven with a dollop of crème fraiche or a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Sometimes, one craves the pure taste of pears. Other times, a little spice is nice. In this recipe I call for cardamom and ginger, but they're optional. If you are a chai lover, swap out the cardamom and ginger in favor of a ground chai mixture. Make sure it's a version that does not have any tea in it, just the spices added when making chai. I use House Chai Spice Mix from Lake Missoula Tea Company, which comes ground. Whatever spices you choose, use them sparingly; the goal isn't to upstage the pears but merely to add a note of fragrance. My recommendation: Stay close to the kitchen when this tart is baking. The smell is too heavenly to miss.

Pear Tarte Tatin

Subtly spiced with cardamom and ginger, this simple dessert elevates the usual lineup of holiday pies. For a flavor variation, replace the cardamom and ginger with 1 teaspoon chai spice.

TOTAL TIME: 45 minutes

SERVES: 4-6



EMMA FISHMAN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL,
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Ingredients

- 1 package (14-17 ounces) frozen all-butter puff pastry, such as Dufour brand, thawed
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour, for dusting
- 8 pears, such as Bartlett, Bosc or Anjou
- ½ cup unsalted butter
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup muscovado or light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground green cardamom
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- Crème fraiche, for serving

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Set thawed puff pastry on a floured surface.
2. Peel, halve and core pears. Slice each half into 3 slices.
3. In a heavy, ovenproof 9-inch skillet or tarte Tatin dish over medium-high heat, melt butter. Stir in sugars and lemon juice. Reduce heat to medium. Add cardamom and ginger, and cook, stirring, until mixture has a loose syrup consistency. Remove from heat.
4. Taking care not to burn your hands, arrange pear slices in pan, slightly

overlapping, in concentric circles. (You may not need all the pears.) Return skillet to medium heat and cook for 5 minutes.

5. Roll pastry dough into a 10-inch circle about ¼-inch thick. Remove skillet from heat. Blanket pears with pastry round. Use the back of a spoon to gently tuck outer edge of pastry between pears and skillet. (It will form the sides of the tart once you flip it.) Use a sharp knife to poke 6 small slits in pastry.

6. Place skillet on a baking sheet, as juices may run over during baking. Bake until pastry is golden-brown, about 25 minutes.

7. Set aside to cool for five minutes. Run a butter knife around edges of tart to loosen any bits stuck to the side. To flip the tart, place a sturdy plate at least 10 inches in diameter over the skillet. Use a potholder to grip the handle of the skillet in one hand and place your other hand flat on the back of the plate. Flip the tart. Tap the skillet to encourage any stuck bits to dislodge.

8. Don't worry if some pears stick to the skillet. Remove with a spatula and rearrange on the tart. Serve warm with dollops of cool crème fraiche.

—Adapted from Aleksandra Crapanzano

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