



My, My Chicken Pie

Pies are my guilty pleasure. It's the pastry – the thick pastry, not cooked until perfectly crisp all the way through, no no no, but with ripples and dimples of what I call 'sog'. I like to make shallow pies with almost equal amounts of pastry and filling. Pie, soggy bits and tomato sauce. Yes, please.

Feeds a family of 8

1 large chicken, about 1.5kg
2 bay leaves
1 large onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, chopped
1 chicken stock cube
1 litre milk, plus extra for brushing
2 leeks, diced
300g button mushrooms
50g butter
50ml water
50g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
200ml double cream
a handful of flat-leaf parsley, chopped
500g all-butter puff pastry (I like the blocks you can roll out)
salt and freshly ground black pepper

The filling

Heat the oven to 200°C/gas 6.

Drop the chicken into a really large pan with the bay leaves, onion, garlic and stock cube and season. Add 500ml of the milk and then top up with water to cover the chicken. Bring to the boil and then slowly simmer for 30 minutes.

Remove the chicken and leave to cool breast-side down on a plate. Strain the cooking liquid, keeping back 500ml. Throw away the rest.

Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan, cook the leeks and mushrooms in the butter over a medium heat with the water until soft. Add the flour and stir to make a paste (a roux), then slowly add the remaining 500ml of milk and the reserved cooking liquid, stirring all the time to make the sauce. Bring to the boil and the sauce will thicken to a sticky, custardy consistency, then stir in the cream.

Peel the skin off the chicken and throw it away (it's not nice in a pie). Strip the chicken carcass of all its meat and tear into thumb-sized pieces.

The pie

Drop the chicken into the leek and mushroom sauce, add the parsley, season and stir it all together. Spoon the pie filling into a lasagne dish and leave the mixture to cool a little.

On a lightly floured worktop, roll out the pastry until it's the size of the top of the dish. Lift up the pastry using the rolling pin and cover the dish. Brush with milk and stab the middle of the pie a few times to make holes to let the air out.

Put the pie on a baking sheet and into the oven it goes. Cook for 30–35 minutes until golden and bubbling around the edges.

A pie must be served with tomato sauce and be careful, the pie will be really hot.



Indonesian Fish Curry with Clams, Mussels and Beansprouts

This is a proper treat, a pot of spiced deliciousness. It's not cheap, I know, but it really is a worthwhile big bowl of fun and flavour. It will feed a big family and as many friends that you can get around the table. Let people serve themselves with as much or as little of the shells as they like.

Feeds a big family

- 50ml vegetable oil
- 3 tablespoons Thai red curry paste (bought or see page 102)
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 2 x 400ml tins coconut milk, left in the fridge overnight
- 200ml water
- 10 fresh kaffir lime leaves
- 10 fresh curry leaves
- 200g clams, cleaned
- 200g mussels, cleaned
- 1kg skinned white fish, such as cod, pollock and haddock, cut into 5cm chunks
- 12 large prawns
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- a handful of cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 2½ tablespoons lime juice

To serve

- 150g beansprouts
- a handful of mint leaves

Get the curry going

Heat the oil in a wok, add the red curry paste and paprika, stir and cook for a couple of minutes over a high heat. Add 100ml of the coconut milk, stir and cook on a lower heat for 5 minutes. Add the remaining coconut milk, the water, lime leaves and curry leaves and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes until thickened and creamy, then remove from the heat.

Cook the clams and mussels

Cook the clams and the mussels separately. Put about 100ml of the sauce into a large pan, add the clams and bring to the boil, then cover with the lid and cook for about 4-5 minutes over a high heat until all the shells have opened (throw away any shells that are broken or do not open – these are bad for you). Repeat with the mussels.

Finish

Bring the wok with the remaining sauce to the boil, drop in the fish and prawns along with the salt and tomatoes. When it comes to a simmer, take it off the heat, give it a good stir and add the lime juice. Put the beansprouts and mint leaves into the base of individual bowls and pour over the curry. The beansprouts will cook and all the flavour in the mint will be released. Keep the clams and mussels separate for everyone to help themselves.

Leftovers

Great the next day: heat it up and toss it through some noodles.



Posh Curry Cutlets

There won't be any leftovers when you serve this clever, easy-to-cook dish to your friends. Once cooked, the curried racks of lamb can either be sliced into cutlets or served whole as a grand centrepiece. Should you not have the time to make the Madras paste from scratch, that's fine, you can use a good-quality jar of paste instead. Sometimes it's okay to cheat.

Feeds 6-8

2 x 8-bone racks of lamb, trimmed

24 Charlotte potatoes, peeled

1 x 400g tin chickpeas, drained

200ml thick Greek yoghurt
small bunch of coriander, chopped

For the Madras paste

1 teaspoon ground cardamom

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

2 teaspoons fenugreek seeds

1 teaspoon black peppercorns

2 teaspoons garam masala

4 teaspoons coriander seeds

1 teaspoon ground turmeric

1 teaspoon fennel seeds

2 teaspoons mustard seeds

2 teaspoons dried chilli powder

1 onion, chopped

6 garlic cloves

80g fresh root ginger, peeled

50g butter

50ml vegetable oil

150ml brown malt vinegar

The paste

Put all the spices in a dry pan over a high heat and toast for about 2 minutes until they colour and become fragrant. Grind them to a powder using a mortar and pestle or a spice grinder (a food processor doesn't do the job).

Using a mortar and pestle or food-processor, purée the onion, garlic and ginger.

Place a large, heavy-based frying pan over a medium heat add the butter, oil and the purée and cook for 2 minutes. Add the ground spices and vinegar and mix to a paste. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes, until bubbling, fragrant and the paste starts to split.

The lamb

Heat the oven to 200°C/gas 6.

Score the fat on the racks of lamb deeply. Place the racks, fat-side down, in a cold frying pan. Turn the heat up to medium and leave for a good 5 minutes, until the fat renders and your kitchen smells of roast lamb.

Meanwhile, par-cook the potatoes in a large pan of boiling water for just 10 minutes. Drain and transfer the potatoes to a roasting tin. Add the chickpeas and a tablespoon of the curry paste and mix well. Spread the mixture evenly over the roasting tin.

Rub the remaining curry paste all over the lamb and then put the racks of lamb fat-side up on top of the potatoes. Cook in the oven for 25 minutes (do not open the oven door). Yes, 25 minutes.

Remove from the oven and leave the lamb to rest for 10 minutes. Mix the potatoes and chickpeas with the yoghurt and coriander, then tuck in.

[And to posh it up even more...](#)

[Serve the cutlets with grilled tomatoes, some dressed watercress or a tasty green salad.](#)



Chocolate and Coconut Pie

This is one of those Australianisms that probably started life as a banoffee pie or maybe a lemon meringue pie but developed into a boozy chocolate pie. It's topped with a caramel-flavoured Italian meringue that just needs to be browned with a blowtorch or in the oven.

Enough for 10-12

350g digestive biscuits
120g butter, melted
55g desiccated coconut
200g milk chocolate, broken into pieces
200g dark chocolate, broken into pieces
250ml double cream
180ml milk
100g soft light brown sugar
4 egg yolks (keep the egg whites for the meringue)
150ml coconut liqueur, such as Malibu
40g cornflour

For the meringue

220g caster sugar
60ml water
4 egg whites
½ teaspoon cream of tartar

Make the base

Place the biscuits, melted butter and 25g of the desiccated coconut in a food-processor and blitz until they form crumbs. Press the crumbs into a 23cm fluted tart tin, making sure the crumbs cover the base and come all the way up the sides of the tin. Chill in the fridge.

Make the filling

Slowly heat the chocolates, cream, milk and sugar in a large pan over a low heat, stirring all the time, until the chocolate has melted and you have a thick mixture.

In a large bowl, beat the egg yolks with the coconut liqueur and cornflour. Set the bowl over a pan of gently simmering water (making sure the water doesn't touch the base of the bowl). Pour the hot chocolate mixture into the bowl and give it a good stir. What you're making here is chocolate custard. Keep stirring it for about 5 minutes or until it becomes thick. Take off the heat and leave to cool for 10 minutes, stirring it continuously until it's cool.

Pour the custard into the biscuit case and spread it out evenly. Sprinkle with the remaining desiccated coconut and put it into the fridge to chill for a good hour.

Make the meringue

Put the sugar and water into a small pan, bring to the boil and continue to boil for about 5 minutes (don't stir it) until the sugar has melted and the mixture becomes a light caramel colour.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, whisk the egg whites with the cream of tartar until they form stiff peaks (an electric whisk is good for this).

Now it's time to make Italian meringue. Once the caramel has its tan, take it off the heat and leave it to cool for 3 minutes. While beating, slowly drizzle the hot sugar into the egg whites, but you've got to keep on beating. Add all the sugar mixture and continue to beat until the meringue is shiny.

Pie time

Take the set custard base out of the fridge and spoon the meringue over the top. Either heat the oven to 220°/gas 7 or use a blowtorch to brown the top of the meringue. If using the oven, leave it for 3 minutes or until the meringue starts to colour – keep an eye on it.