APPLE TART WITH CALVADOS

Makes one 8- to 10-inch tart

1 Pâte Brisée shell (page 338), unbaked
8 medium pippin apples
½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
2 tablespoons Calvados (apple brandy)
1 teaspoon almond extract
3 tablespoons sugar

½ cup toasted ground almonds
¼ cup sugar (or to taste)
1 tablespoon Calvados or Cognac
½ cup apricot preserves

1. Peel, core, and slice 6 of the apples. Place them in a saucepan with about ½ inch of water and the nutmeg, Calvados, almond extract, and sugar, and simmer over low heat until the apples are soft. Increase the heat to evaporate the excess liquid, stirring the mixture to keep it from scorching. The filling will resemble applesauce. Set the filling aside to cool.

2. Peel and core the remaining apples and cut them in half lengthwise. Place one half on a board cut-side down, and thinly slice it lengthwise, holding the slices together.

3. Preheat oven to 425°. Sprinkle the ground almonds over the bottom of the pastry shell. Spread the apple filling into the crust. Place a sliced apple half on the filling and fan it out in a circular pattern. Repeat with the remaining sliced apple halves, covering the filling with concentric circles of apple slices. Sprinkle the apples with sugar to taste. Bake the tart for about 25 minutes.

4. Cool the tart and brush it with the Calvados or Cognac. Prepare the apricot glaze by melting the preserves over medium-low heat in a small saucepan. Strain the heated preserves through a fine sieve to remove the lumps. Brush the glaze over the top of the tart, and serve.

PÂTE BRISÉE

Makes two 8-inch pastry shells

Pâte brisée — basic pie dough — can be made using several techniques. The fat can be cut into the flour, using two knives, a pastry blender, or a food processor fitted with the steel blade. The butter should be thoroughly chilled, and you must work quickly so it doesn't melt and become greasy. The object is to make small bits of butter that are coated with flour. Liquids are mixed in quickly and lightly to form a light dough. Overworking this or any pastry dough makes it tough and heavy. Leftover pastry can be formed into a ball, wrapped in plastic wrap, and frozen.

Another excellent pie pastry can be found with recipes for Charcuterie quiches (page 103). To make dessert tarts with pâte brisée, refer to chapter 7.

1½ cups unbleached, all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, chilled
1 egg yolk
4 to 5 tablespoons cold water

1. Sift the flour and salt into a mixing bowl. Cut the chilled butter into ⅛-inch pats, and add them to the flour. Cut the butter into the flour just until the mixture is coarse and mealy.

2. Make a well in the mixture. Stir together the egg yolk and 2 tablespoons of the water, and, using a fork, stir them into the flour, working quickly to form a light dough. Add only enough additional water to make a dough that has a somewhat dry appearance but that holds together.

3. Turn the dough out onto a work surface. Using the heel of your hand, press the dough in a streak about 8 inches long. Gather the dough back into a ball, and wrap it in plastic wrap. Chill it at least 30 minutes.

4. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to the desired thickness, about ¼ inch thick for quiche, a bit thicker for pie. Work quickly as you roll the dough, and roll from the center to the edge.

5. Use the pastry to line tart shells or quiche rings. It should be fitted into the pans without stretching, because stretched pastry can shrink from the sides of the pan when it bakes. An easy way to transfer the pastry is to loosely roll it around the rolling pin, then unroll it over the pan. Use your floured thumb to press the dough into the sides of the pan, cut off any excess, and form an edge.

6. To prebake the pastry shell (called baking it "blind"), preheat the oven to 400°. Prick the pastry with a fork in several places to prevent shrinkage. Line the pastry with foil and fill it with pie weights, dried beans, or rice, and bake it for 10 minutes. Remove the weights and bake the crust another 2 to 5 minutes, or until it is light golden brown. Proceed as directed for either sweet or savory tarts.

FOOD PROCESSOR PÂTE BRISÉE

Makes two 8-inch pastry shells

2 cups unbleached, all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
8 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into pieces and frozen (see note)
2 tablespoons lard, cut into pieces and frozen
6 to 8 tablespoons ice water

1. Combine the flour and salt in the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the steel blade. Blend by using two on/off pulses. Drop in the pieces of frozen butter and lard, and pulse three to four times, then continue to process until the mixture becomes crumbly, resembling coarse meal.

2. With the machine running, add the ice water, one tablespoon at a time. When the mixture lumps together, remove it from the work bowl to a pastry board and quickly press the dough into a patty with your hands.

3. Wrap the dough in wax paper or plastic wrap and chill for 20 to 30 minutes. Roll and use as directed.

NOTE

The butter and lard must be frozen because of heat generated by the steel blade. Overly soft fats prevent the pastry from flaking. The lard makes the pastry richer and flakier. If you are making dessert pastry, add one tablespoon of sugar to the recipe.