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## You Can Make Homemade Pie Crust

ReadyMade

By Casey Barber



It was a new sensation to flop on the bed at the end of the day, peel off my jeans, and realize I reeked of butter and flour. What—you didn't know you could reek of flour? Try spending just a few hours in the thick of things at [King Arthur Flour](#) in Norwich, Vermont, and you'll think differently.



For two days, I submitted myself to total immersion in all things doughy at [Blog & Bake](#), an event hosted by the incomparable team of bakers at King Arthur Flour. We tackled all the big, scary issues: fear of yeast, fear of shoving a whisper-thin pizza crust into a yawning 600° wood-fired oven, fear of over-aggressive kneading, and fear of breaking down a chicken breast (this one was thanks to [Sara Moulton](#), who not only gamely threw on her cooking Converse and got floury with the rest of us in a bread baking seminar, but then jumped into an entire four-course demonstration of the dinner we'd eat later that night at the [Norwich Inn](#). She is a peach.)



But perhaps the biggest accomplishment of all was the way King Arthur's pie crust guru Susan Miller helped ten otherwise confident women solve the heartrending and eternal pie crust tug-of-war between tender and flaky. Here's how she broke it down.

First, a little kitchen science: the more you work your fat (typically butter, shortening, or lard, all of which are composed of both fat and water molecules) into your flour, the less water you'll need to add to create dough, leaving fewer opportunities for tough and stretchy gluten to develop to end up with a homogenous and tender crust.

When you leave large chunks of said fat standing alone in your dough, the more water you'll need to incorporate on its own, developing more gluten in the dough (thus making it a bit tougher) but also creating those gorgeous flaky bits, like layers of shale, caused by the melting layers of fat and flour.



How do you get a good balance of tender and flaky in your pie dough? Easy. Just incorporate your choice of fat (we used all butter) in two stages. Susan likes to use a pastry blender, although you can do it by hand—or use a **food processor**. Chunk half the butter into 1/2-inch cubes and work it into the flour, pushing the pastry blender down the side of the bowl, then turning it incrementally before making the next push to make the process go faster.

When the color of the flour starts to change slightly from flat white to creamy buttermilk, and the texture starts to look like slightly moist cornmeal with pea-size butter lumps mixed in, that's when it's time to add the second half of your butter. Follow the same blending method: the first round of butter will continue to disperse and moisten the dough, while the second round will remain in larger, colder chunks.

Then add the water, a few tablespoons at a time, just until the dough stays together when you squeeze a glob together in your hand.

When rolling out the dough, stick to moving your rolling pin in one direction—usually straight away from you—instead of radiating out in different directions like spokes on a wheel or rays of the sun. The consistent directional motion prevents “gluten confusion,” as baking instructor Robyn Sargent calls it.

But, you may ask, how will I keep my pie crust in a large circle if I only roll in one direction? Also easy. Give the dough round slight turns as you go, and keep mounding and pressing the edges back into a circle with each turn to prevent cracks and maintain the circular shape.



And there's a final ingenious tip on getting your crust into the pie plate. Once the dough is as thin and large as you desire—when centering your pie plate on top of the dough round, you should have 3/4 inch overhang on all sides—lightly dust the dough with flour and gently fold in half. Fold in half again to quarter the dough, then place the point of the crust directly in the center of your pie plate before unfolding the whole thing.



Ten of us tried it. Ten of us succeeded, even those who swore up and down (ahem, **Amber**) that they carried an unforgivable **Pie Crust Curse**. With those stats, either the bakers at King Arthur Flour snuck muscle relaxants into our morning coffee to make us über-confident in our pie skills, or there's really something to this method. My money's on the latter. Keep reading for the recipe.

## **Pie Crust**

adapted from *The King Arthur Flour Baker's Companion*

Makes two 9-inch pie crusts

### Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups (10 1/2 oz) King Arthur Unbleached All-purpose Flour

1 teaspoon sea salt

2 sticks unsalted butter, well chilled

4–6 tablespoons ice water

1. Whisk the flour and sea salt (and sugar, if using) in a large bowl or pulse 2–3 times in the bowl of a food processor.
2. Add half the butter as directed above and combine, either by hand, with a fork or pastry blender, or by pulsing in the food processor until the flour resembles moist cornmeal. Add the remaining butter as directed above.
3. Drizzle in the ice water a few tablespoons at a time, stirring gently with a plastic dough scraper or fork to combine, until the dough is shaggy but just holds its shape when squeezed in your hand.
4. Mound the dough onto a floured surface and use the palm of your hand to smear the dough down the side of the mound to the counter. Pastry chefs call this *fraisage* and it's this technique that ensures an extraordinarily flaky crust. Smear two or three times until the dough holds together and the butter is still chunky but streaked throughout.
5. Divide the dough into two portions and pat each firmly into a disc, then wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least an hour before rolling out.