

How to Bake a Pie: A Bachelor's Primer

By Dennis Payton Knight

A pie is a baked dish made of a pastry dough casing that contains a filling of various sweet or savory ingredients ranging from little Jack Horner's plums to four and twenty blackbirds. Plums are recommended for the novice as they are content to stay in the crust long enough to get baked, but if your choice is blackbirds, be sure to have a net or wing clipping device nearby.

Before you even think of the stuffing, however, you will need a crust, either on top, underneath, or both. Otherwise, you get pudding. Or an omelet.

For the crust, take out a bowl big enough to grind ingredients without spilling. You will need flour, and I suggest you run to the store to get a new bag because the one on your top shelf, the one from seven years ago, will have bugs. Don't even look. It will only make you itch.

Next Betty Crocker directs you to sift the flour. Yes, sift, without an H. Sift is something you do to flour, shift is something you do to a Ford. To sift flour, you need a sifter. Go back to the store. It will look a little like a big tin can with a trigger handle and the label peeled off.

Fill the sifter with flour, and point it in the general direction of the bowl, but first spread old newspapers around the kitchen to capture the fallout. Our recipe calls for two cups of flour, as measured in the sifted stage, not the pre-sifted stage. If you start out with four cups, or even the whole bag, chances are good your bowl will net two cups from the floating, sifted cloud.

Now you need some lard, which is pig fat obtained from any part of the pig where there is a high proportion of adipose tissue. If you need a picture of what that means, think about the time the coach called you a lard-ass, and it will be clear. Go back to the store.

When you return, lard in hand, measure two-thirds of a cup into the flour in the bowl. Add a teaspoon of salt, and a quarter cup of water. It will occur to you the flour is shifting back from sifted to unsifted, but don't ask why. Maybe Betty Crocker owns the sifter factory.

A pastry blender is suggested at this point. If you do not have one, you can use two knives of about equal size in a cutting motion. You do have the motor skills and courage, but don't be foolhardy. Avoid machetes, swords, or implements with points.

You will be caught up in a ghostly blizzard, and be floured from hair to toe, but wasn't it fun? Now gather up the newspapers, discard the doughy residue, and shower. Return to the supermarket, but this time go straight to frozen foods, and pick yourself something nice from the Sara Lee collection.