

*RX for ALL your Pie Making ills:*

YIPES ...it is not even Halloween yet and I have been inundated the past few days with "PIE PROBLEM" emails....Soooo OK, The "Pie Doctor" is in, ready to diagnose your pie problems.

For some, baking a pie is, as they say "easy as pie." But for others it's an ABSOLUTE exercise in frustration. Pie-making is much like an art that takes a bit of mastering, but once you know all the important steps, it's rather easy. So, If you have tried baking pies in the past with little to no success or just want to brush up on your pie-making skills, I hope that this is the guide for you.

Whether your pies come out under baked, burned, soggy, dry or mushy, there's a remedy for it all. You will soon be making pies like a professional. This guide will come in handy especially since we are in the middle of pie-making season and the holidays are just around the corner.



OK now, just step into the Pie Doctor's office, please!

**Symptom:** My fruit pie's bottom crust is soggy -

The golden rule in pies is "make it cold, bake it hot." This means your pie dough should always (I MEAN ALWAYS) be cold -- when it's being made, when it's being rolled out, and before it goes in the oven. The oven should be hot when the pie goes in. Invest in a good oven thermometer to see that the oven has reached the proper temperature during preheating. This technique prevents many maladies, soggy being one of them.

**Remedies:** Soggy crust can be a result of under baking the pie, or using a filling that's too watery -- or a combination of both those errors. To prevent under baking, make sure to bake your pies until absolutely golden brown and watch to check that the filling is bubbling. Soggy crusts can also be the result of using the wrong type of pan. I confess that I prefer Pyrex glass pie plates, because it's easy to see the bottom.

**Additional tips:** A light dusting of flour or ground nuts in the bottom of the pie, before adding the filling, can also keep the bottom from becoming soggy by absorbing any excess liquids from the filling. You can also brush the pie dough with a beaten egg white before adding the filling. The egg white forms a somewhat impermeable layer that will help keep any filling juices from turning the crust soggy.

**Symptom:** My fruit filling is mushy -

Using overripe fruit always leads to a mushy pie. Very ripe fruit should only be used in chilled pies, not baked into pies.

**Remedy:** Use firm, almost under ripe fruit in pies. In addition, certain fruits, like apples and pears have different textures depending on the variety. **NOTE:** Certain apples are better for pies than others. Red Delicious, McIntosh and Golden Delicious turn into applesauce inside a pie. Try apples like Granny Smith,

Crispin (Mutsu), Jonathan, Jonagold, Macoun, Fuji and Winesap. A combination of different varieties leads to the best pie, one with great texture and not mushiness (pls. see my [Apple Variety Guide](#) at the end for more information).

**Symptom:** My custard pie crust is soggy because I skipped blind baking -

Certain pies, like custard pies and pumpkin pies, require the bottom crust to be blind-baked, which just means pre-baking it without the filling. This ensures the crust won't get soggy. Consult your recipe to see whether the pie shell should be blind baked or not.

**Remedy:** To blind bake, dock the pie dough in the pie plate with a fork. (Docking is the process of pricking the bottom layer of dough in the pie pan with the tines of a fork.) Chill for an hour. Then line with foil or parchment paper and fill to the TOP with [pie weights](#) or dried beans. Bake at a moderate temperature (350 degrees F) for about 10 to 20 minutes, or until the crust is lightly browned, removing the pie weights halfway through

**Symptom:** My crust is under baked -

Many novice pie bakers don't bake their pies at a high enough temperature. The pie ends up stewing in its own liquid and the crust turns almost raw and soggy. What happens is that all the butter in the crust just melts into the dough without evaporating, making it impossible to get a flaky crust.

**Remedy:** Start out pies -- especially fruit pies, like apple -- at a high temperature, between 425 and 450 degrees F. Reduce the temperature to around 350 or 375 degrees F after about 20 to 30 minutes and continue baking until the pie is nicely browned and the filling is bubbling.

**Symptom:** My crust is dry and hard -

This is a result of overworking the pie dough, which basically, overworks the gluten in the flour and turns what would have been a nice dough into a gummy one.

**Remedy:** The most important part about making pie dough is to work it as little as possible and to keep all the ingredients as cold as possible (cold air allows the gluten to relax, preventing it from seizing up). Use cold butter and ice-cold water. Some bakers go as far as to chill the flour and the mixing bowl. If you have made the dough well, you should see flakes and streaks of butter.

**Symptom:** My pie has air space between the filling and the top crust -

This often happens with sky-high apple pies, when the pie is mounded with apple chunks. The top layer hardens up in the oven before the filling is completely cooked. The filling shrinks during baking, and you're left with a giant gap between the top crust and the filling.

**Remedy:** To prevent the air space, it's a good idea to cut the fruit into smaller chunks or thin slices. Or, you could also precook your pie filling, which allows it to shrink before you place the pie top on. This will dramatically decrease the size of the "GAP"

**Symptom:** My pie is pale –

A pale pie just isn't that attractive -- it doesn't call out "eat me" like a nicely browned pie does.

**Remedy:** Brushing the top crust with an [egg wash](#) will create a nicely browned and glossy appearance. An egg beaten with a touch of water, cream or milk can be used as an egg wash. You can scatter the pie with coarse sugar, which sticks to the wash and creates a sweet crunch when eating

**Symptom:** My pie bubbles over –

This happens, especially with lattice pies. So do not be too worried about it. However, you can take a few steps to help prevent it from happening.

**Remedies:** Crimp the edges of a double crust pie very securely to ensure the pie will not bubble over around the edges. Bake the pie on a sheet pan to collect any juices and keep your oven clean at the same time. **Additional tip:** Make sure there is a vent hole in the center of the top crust or a few slashes. This will help release steam, which would otherwise cause the pie to leak its juices everywhere. The vent hole also serves as a window into the filling to check if the fruit is thoroughly cooked.

**Symptom:** My custard pie is cracked –

Custard pies, pumpkin pies and even pecan pies have a tendency to crack if baked at a very high temperature. Over baking also leads to a noticeable crack -- not to mention a dry filling.

**Remedies:** Be sure to bake these types of pies at a lower temperature, such as 375 degrees F. Also baking in a water bath, like you would with a cheesecake, can help prevent a crack. Make sure not to over bake the pie -- the center of the pie should be slightly jiggly when it is done

**Symptom:** My piecrust shrinks –

This is a result of blind baking a pie shell without using pie weights and/or not chilling the pie shell before baking.

**Remedy:** Not only should you always chill your disk of pie dough before rolling it out, you should also *always* chill your pie dough once it's in the pie plate, before adding any filling -- for at least 30 minutes. This ensures the crust will not shrink dramatically in the oven. The golden rule in pie baking is "make it cold, bake it hot." This means the pie should go in the oven cold and the oven should already be very hot.

**Symptom:** My fruit pie filling is runny –

Fresh fruit is naturally watery and baking fruit just draws water out. The baker's dilemma is striking the perfect balance to create a filling that's not watery, but also not dry.

**Remedies:** One solution is to use a thickener, such as flour, cornstarch, potato starch or tapioca -- they are highly recommended for fruit pies. These thickeners are hardly noticeable by taste and they hold together the juices well. Flour and cornstarch tend to create a cloudy filling (most noticeable in cherry pies), so if you prefer, use tapioca or potato starch for a clear filling. Another solution is to precook the filling (using an aforementioned thickener, if you wish). You can precook half the filling and then combine it with the remaining filling ingredients.

**Additional tip:** Make sure the pie is completely cooled before cutting it. A fruit pie will be extremely watery if you cut into it while it's still warm or hot.

**Symptom:** My crust is burned –

Some pies, like apple, need a long baking time. Baking a pie to perfection sometimes requires baking it a little longer, even if your crust looks like it's adequately browned. This might lead to a burned crust edge.

**Remedy:** Use aluminum foil or metal pie crust shields to keep the crust from burning. If your pie is completely burned, you've baked it at too high a temperature or your oven is out of whack.