

Fabulous Fruit Tarts

When I was toiling away at my Ph.D., I coped with academia's absence of short-term gratification by baking. I tried all of the basics as well as the most ridiculously complicated Martha Stewart recipes to reward myself for surviving statistics, comprehensive exams, the pain of [losing months of work](#) at the hand of a well-meaning research assistant, and the writing process itself. And while early parenthood made culinary endeavors above 10 minutes obsolete, now that Laurel enjoys helping in the kitchen (she's learned what the rewards are), basic baking is back.

Baking tends to be an exacting business, which is all the more reason why it is hugely gratifying to cobble together a recipe on the fly and have it work out. Last weekend, faced with the desire to make a cherry pie for a brunch gathering (we had pie dough in the freezer), but no interest in going to the market for more cherries (we only had one of the three jars required for our recipe), I decided to try making a third of the cherry pie filling recipe (culled from our trusty [Baking Illustrated](#) bible) in tart form (i.e., negating the need for a lot of filling).

The results were fabulous (I'm planning on repeating this recipe for a baby shower I'm throwing this summer), and if you don't dig cherries, use any of your favorite fruit pie fillings. Here's the how to (click thumbnail to see an enlarged picture of the tarts in pre-bake form):

- Prepare dough for one 9-inch single crust pie (Martha Stewart's [Pate Brisée](#) is easy to assemble with a Cuisinart and makes two servings of dough – you can double this recipe or freeze one dough round for future use). You could also try this recipe with a soft store bought dough, but homemade crust is really, really worth it.
- Make one third of your favorite 9-inch fruit pie filling. Breaking ingredients into thirds can make for dodgy math ([click here](#) for a helpful conversion table), but if you're basically mixing fruit and sugar, it's tough to go wrong. For the cherry tart filling I mixed 1 1/3 tablespoons cornstarch, 1/3 cup + 1 tablespoon sugar, and a dash of cinnamon, then mixed in one 24-ounce jar of Morello cherries (drained and halved; available at [Trader Joe's](#)) and a dash of almond extract.

Then:

- Divide dough into 16 pieces. Roll out circles about 3 inches in diameter and fit into the cups of an ungreased muffin tin. Push the top edges of the dough so they are roughly even all the way around. Freeze for about 20-30 minutes until the dough is solid.
- Heat oven to 400 degrees. Remove dough from freezer and divide pie filling evenly across dough cups. Bake about 18-20 minutes until crusts are golden brown.
- Cool in muffin tin. Run a knife carefully along edges to pop tarts out of the muffin tin. Dust with confectionary sugar to up the wow factor.

Note: Sixteen is a bit of an odd yield number (it just looked like the right division when eyeing the dough) so you could try cutting the dough into 12 pieces (i.e., for one muffin tray) and dividing the filling equally across. You might need to extend the baking time a minute or two to accommodate.