

## Star-Topped Mince Pies

**Servings:** 36 Pies

**Prep Time:** +40min chilling/resting

**Cook Time:** 35min



### Ingredients

#### FOR THE PASTRY

- 240 grams plain flour
- 60 grams vegetable shortening
- 60 grams cold butter
- juice of 1 orange
- 1 pinch of salt
- approx. 350 grams mincemeat
- icing sugar (for dusting)

#### FOR THE CRANBERRY STUDED MINCEMEAT - MAKES ABOUT 600ML / 2½ CUPS

- 60 millilitres ruby port
- 75 grams soft dark brown sugar
- 300 grams cranberries
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- 75 grams currants
- 75 grams raisins
- 30 grams dried cranberries
- finely grated zest and juice of 1 clementine
- 25 millilitres brandy
- 3 drops almond extract
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons honey

### Directions

1. Make the mincemeat in advance. In a large pan, dissolve the sugar in the ruby port over a gentle heat. Add the cranberries and stir. Add the cinnamon, ginger and cloves, currants, raisins, dried cranberries and the zest and juice of the clementine. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 20 minutes, or until the fruit has broken down and has absorbed most of the liquid in the pan. (You may need to squish the cranberries a little with the back of a wooden spoon to incorporate them fully.) Remove from the heat and allow to cool a little. Add the brandy, almond extract, vanilla extract and honey and stir well with a wooden spoon to mash the mixture down into a paste. Spoon the mincemeat into sterilised jars and, once cool, store in the fridge for up to two weeks.

2. Then once you are ready to make your mince pies, get out a tray of miniature tart tins, each indent 4.5cm / 2 inches in diameter, along with a 5.5cm / 2¼ inch fluted, round biscuit cutter and a 4cm / 1¾ inch star cutter.
3. Measure the flour into a shallow bowl or dish and, with a teaspoon, dollop little mounds of vegetable shortening into the bowl, add the butter, diced small, shake to cover it, then put in the freezer for 20 minutes. This is what will make the pastry so tender and flaky later. Mix together the orange juice and salt in a separate, small bowl, cover and leave in the fridge to chill.
4. After the 20 minutes, empty the flour and fat into the bowl of your food processor and blitz until you've got a pale pile of porridge-like crumbs. Pour the salted juice down the funnel, pulsing until it looks as if the dough is about to cohere; you want to stop just before it does (even if some orange juice is left). If all your juice is used up and you need more liquid, add some iced water.
5. If you prefer to use a freestanding mixer to make the pastry, cut the fats into the flour with the flat paddle, leaving the bowl in the fridge to chill down for the 20-minute flour-and-fat-freezer session. Add liquid as above. I often find the pastry uses more liquid in the mixer than the processor.
6. Turn the mixture out of the processor or mixing bowl onto a pastry board or work surface and, using your hands, combine to a dough. Then form into 3 discs (you'll need to make these in 3 batches, unless you've got enough tart tins to make all 36 pies at once).
7. Wrap each disc in clingfilm and put in the fridge to rest for 20 minutes. Preheat the oven to 220°C/200°C Fan/gas mark 7/425°F.
8. Roll out the discs, one at a time, as thinly as you can without exaggerating; in other words, you want a light pastry case, but one sturdy enough to support the dense mincemeat. This is easy-going dough, so you don't have to pander to it: just get rolling and patch up as you need.
9. Out of each rolled-out disc cut out circles a little wider than the indentations in the tart tins; I use a fluted cookie cutter for this. Press these circles gently into the moulds and dollop in a scant teaspoon of mincemeat.
10. Then cut out your stars with your little star cutter – re-rolling the pastry as necessary – and place the tops lightly on the mincemeat.
11. Put in the oven and bake for 10–15 minutes: keep an eye on them as they really don't take long and ovens do vary.
12. Remove from the oven, prising out the little pies straight away and letting the empty tin cool down before you start putting in the pastry for the next batch. Carry on until they're all done.
13. Dust over some icing sugar by pushing it through a tea strainer.