

# custard pie

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## Custard Pie

Egg, milk, sugar, nutmeg. The plainest pie in the folder and the hardest to make well, because there is nothing to hide behind and because the two components want opposite things from the oven: pastry wants a hot oven, custard wants a cool one.

Every technique below exists to resolve that conflict.

## What makes it work

- **Blind bake the shell completely and seal it with egg white.** A custard pie is the classic soggy bottom, and the seal is what prevents it.
- **Scald the milk first and pour it in hot.** A warm custard poured into a warm shell reaches setting temperature much faster, so the pastry spends less time wet. This is the professional trick for this pie specifically.
- **Bake at 160 °C.** Custard sets at 77 °C and curdles above about 85 °C. In a hotter oven the edge passes 85 °C long before the middle reaches 77 °C, and the result is a pie that is watery at the rim and raw in the centre.
- **Strain the mixture and skim the foam.** Bubbles on the surface bake into craters.
- **Pull it at a 6 cm wobble.** It carries over.
- **Grate the nutmeg over at the last moment** so it sits on the surface rather than sinking.

## Ingredients

One 23 cm pie. Serves 8.

- 1 blind-baked, egg-white-sealed shell — [all-butter pie crust](#)
- 600 ml whole [milk](#), or 400 ml milk and 200 ml double cream
- 4 [eggs](#) plus 2 yolks
- 120 g granulated sugar
- 4 g fine salt
- 2 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)
- [nutmeg](#), freshly grated

## Method

Blind bake the shell, brush the inside with beaten egg white, and return it for two minutes. Leave it in the tin and set the oven to **160 °C / 325 °F**.

Scald the milk — bring it just to the point of steaming, not boiling.

Whisk the eggs, yolks, sugar and salt without aerating. Pour the hot milk in slowly, whisking. Add the vanilla. Strain through a fine sieve and skim off any foam.

Set the pie tin on the oven shelf, pour the custard in there rather than carrying a full pie across the kitchen, and grate nutmeg over.

Bake **35–45 minutes**, until set at the edge with a wobble in the middle the size of a coin. It should read **77 °C** at the centre.

Cool completely on a rack.

## Notes

- **A knife test cuts the custard and lets it weep.** Judge by the wobble or with a thermometer.
- The English version, often called a *custard tart*, uses more cream and a sweeter shell; the Portuguese *pastel de nata* is the same custard baked screamingly hot in puff pastry, which is a different set of compromises.

- **Keeps three days refrigerated** but the pastry softens; it is best on day one.

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