

mince pies

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Mince Pies

Small covered pies of spiced dried fruit in suet or butter, eaten in Britain and Ireland at Christmas. The mincemeat once contained actual minced meat — a medieval way of preserving it in sugar, spirit and spice — and the meat disappeared gradually through the nineteenth century, leaving the suet as the last trace.

Making the mincemeat is the real work, and it should be done weeks ahead.

What makes it work

- **Mincemeat matures.** Made and jarred, it improves for a month and keeps for a year. The alcohol and the sugar concentration are the preservation, and the flavour needs the time to marry. Made and used the same day, it tastes of raw spice.
- **Suet, butter or vegetable suet** — the fat is what carries the spice and keeps the filling from drying. Grated frozen butter works.
- **A sweet, sturdy pastry.** A little sugar and an egg yolk in the shortcrust makes it easier to handle and better with the filling — closer to [pate sucree](#) than to [all-butter pie crust](#).
- **Do not overfill.** A heaped teaspoon per pie. Mincemeat boils and lifts the lid off.
- **Bake hot and briefly,** 200 °C for 18 minutes. The filling is already cooked.

Ingredients

Makes 24 small pies.

Mincemeat — about 1.5 kg, made a month ahead:

- 250 g raisins
- 250 g sultanas
- 250 g currants
- 150 g mixed candied peel
- 200 g cooking [apples](#), grated
- 150 g suet or grated frozen butter
- 250 g dark brown sugar
- zest and juice of 1 [lemon](#) and 1 orange
- 8 g mixed spice, 4 g [cinnamon](#), 2 g [nutmeg](#)
- 100 ml brandy
- 100 g flaked [almonds](#), optional

Pastry:

- 375 g all-purpose flour
- 250 g unsalted butter, cold
- 100 g powdered sugar
- 1 [egg](#) plus 1 yolk
- 4 g fine salt

Method

Mincemeat. Mix everything except the brandy in a large ovenproof bowl. Cover and leave overnight. Bake at **120 °C / 250 °F for 2½ hours** — the fat melts and coats every piece of fruit, which is what makes it keep. Cool, stirring occasionally as it sets, then stir in the brandy and pack into sterilised jars. Leave at least two weeks.

Pies. Rub the butter into the flour, sugar and salt, bind with the egg and yolk, chill one hour.

Roll to 3 mm. Cut 24 rounds with a 7.5 cm cutter for the bases and 24 with a 6 cm cutter, or stars, for the lids. Line a bun tin.

Put a heaped teaspoon of mincemeat in each, damp the rim, and set the lid on, pressing gently. Prick or leave stars open.

Brush with beaten egg, scatter caster sugar, and bake **200 °C / 400 °F for 16–18 minutes** until golden.

Cool five minutes in the tin — the sugar welds them in if left longer — then dust with powdered sugar.

Notes

- **Vegetarian suet** works identically. A fully vegan version uses coconut oil and holds well.
- Frangipane-topped mince pies are the modern bakery version; see [pear frangipane tart](#) for the almond cream.
- **Keeps a week** in a tin, and freezes baked or unbaked for three months.

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