

tarte tatin

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Tarte Tatin

Apples caramelised in butter and sugar in a pan, covered with pastry, baked, and turned out upside down. The Tatin sisters at their hotel in Lamotte-Beuvron are supposed to have invented it by accident around 1898; the story is probably embellished, but the technique is real and it is unlike anything else in this folder because the fruit is cooked twice and the pastry never touches the tin.

What makes it work

- **Cook the caramel and the apples on the hob first, for 20–30 minutes.** This is not a shortcut step. The apples must be partly cooked and the caramel deep amber before the pastry goes on, or the finished tart is pale and watery.
- **Pack the apples in tightly, standing on their cut edges.** They shrink by a third. A loose pan gives a tart with gaps.
- **A firm apple that holds its shape** — Braeburn, Golden Delicious, Reinette. A Bramley collapses into sauce. See [apple](#).
- **Puff pastry or shortcrust, tucked down inside the rim.** Tucking the edge in around the fruit is what makes the finished tart hold together.
- **Invert while hot — within five minutes.** Cooled, the caramel welds everything to the pan.
- **An ovenproof skillet, ideally cast iron.** See [baking equipment](#).

Ingredients

One 25 cm skillet. Serves 8.

- 1.2 kg firm apples, about 8, peeled, quartered and cored
- 150 g granulated sugar
- 100 g unsalted butter
- 3 g fine salt
- 1 tbsp [lemon juice](#)
- 375 g all-butter puff pastry, or 1 disc [all-butter pie crust](#)
- optional: a split vanilla pod, or 1 tsp ground [cinnamon](#)

Method

Toss the apple quarters with the lemon juice.

Melt the butter in the skillet over medium heat, add the sugar and salt, and cook without stirring until it turns pale amber, about five minutes.

Pack the apples in tightly, standing on a cut edge, in concentric rings. Add the vanilla pod if using.

Cook over medium heat **20–30 minutes**, spooning caramel over occasionally, until the apples are tender at the edges and the caramel is deep amber and thick. Take the pan off the heat and let it settle five minutes.

Heat the oven to **200 °C / 400 °F**.

Roll the pastry to a circle 2 cm wider than the pan. Lay it over the apples and tuck the overhang down inside the rim, all the way round. Cut three vents.

Bake **25–30 minutes**, until the pastry is deep gold and crisp.

Rest exactly five minutes. Run a knife round the edge, put a plate over the pan, and invert firmly in one movement. Replace any apple that sticks.

Notes

- **Quinces, pears, peaches, pineapple and even shallots or endive** all take the same treatment; see

[pears](#).

- If the caramel is thin and pale when you invert, it was not cooked long enough on the hob. Reduce the juices in the pan and pour them back over.
- **Serve warm**, with crème fraîche. It does not keep well — the pastry softens under the fruit within hours.

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