



THANKSGIVING DESSERTS

Plant-Based Pies for Every Palate

by Judith Fertig

GratITUDE for the bounty in our lives has been a constant in every American Thanksgiving since the Pilgrims' first celebration at Plymouth Plantation. What has changed is the menu.

Many holiday hosts today wish to be inclusive and respect everyone's increasingly restrictive dietary needs. A few dishes that offer naturally gluten-free, paleo and plant-based options never go

amiss, especially when we're talking pie.

It's easy to make a plant-based pie—think pumpkin, sweet potato and chocolate. As a bonus, many vegan pies can be made ahead and actually taste better the next day.

The Crust

A mellow nut crust might be the best way to go; pecans or almonds, sweetened with dates, crumbled in the food processor and pressed into a pie pan. It's deliciously easy and can be made the day before, always a plus at holiday time. Gluten-free vanilla, chocolate or gingersnap cookie crumbs, mixed with a little coconut oil pressed into the pan, can serve as an alternative to nuts.

The Filling

The freshest filling makes the freshest-tasting pie. Winter vegetables such as squash, small sugar or pie pumpkins or sweet potatoes can be baked in the oven and puréed in the food processor days ahead of time. Or, make the purées weeks ahead and freeze them, ready to thaw for a recipe.

Award-winning cookbook author Deborah Madison, author of *Seasonal Fruit Desserts: From Orchard, Farm, and Market*, in Galisteo, New Mexico, preheats her oven to 375° F. "Cut the squash in half, the pumpkins into quarters, scrape out the seeds and brush the cut surfaces with a vegetable oil such as sunflower or safflower," she suggests.

"Place the squash or pumpkins cut-side-down on a sheet pan. Prick sweet potatoes all over with a fork. Bake the vegetables until tender, about 40 minutes," says Madison. When baked, scoop out the flesh, discard the rinds or skin and purée the flesh in a food processor. About two cups of purée equals a 15-ounce can of pumpkin, sweet potato or butternut squash. Pies made with fresh purées will have a lighter color and flavor.

Madison says she prefers natural sweeteners. "Honey and maple syrup are so dynamic—they're more like foods in their own right than just sweeteners." Maple and date sugars give pies a deep, caramelized flavor.

Always taste test during preparation, recommends Alissa Saenz, of Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, who blogs at *ConnoisseurVeg.com*. She loves a big dose of chai spices and little dose of sweetener in her Vegan Chai-Spiced Sweet Potato Pie. But pie is personal. “I recommend tasting your batter to decide if you’d prefer a little more or less of each,” she says.

Finishing Touches

An ethereal cloud of coconut whipped cream can taste just as delicious as the dairy version, says vegan baker and cookbook author Fran Costigan, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She refrigerates a 14-ounce can of unsweetened, full-fat coconut milk for at least 24 hours. After opening it, she spoons out only the solid coconut cream

into a chilled bowl, saving the remaining liquid coconut milk for another use. She whips the coconut cream with an electric mixer until fluffy, adding a natural sweetener and vanilla extract if desired. It all makes for a perfectly healthy plant pie.

Judith Fertig writes award-winning cookbooks plus foodie fiction from Overland Park, KS (JudithFertig.com).

OUR PICK OF PLANT PIE RECIPES



Vegan Pecan-Date Pie Crust

The crust takes minutes to make and then press into a pie pan.

Yields: One nine-inch pie crust

- 1½ cups pitted dates, preferably Medjool, coarsely chopped
- 1½ cups chopped pecans
- ¼ tsp sea salt
- 2 tsp coconut oil

Soak the dates in hot water for 10 minutes. Remove the dates from the water and pat dry.

Place the dates, pecans and salt in the bowl of a food processor and blend until the mixture sticks together.

Lightly oil the bottom and sides of a nine-inch pie or springform pan.

Press the date mixture into the bottom and up the sides of the prepared pan.

Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Adapted from a recipe by Nava Atlas, of Hudson Valley, NY, vegan cookbook author of Vegan Express: 160 Fast, Easy, & Tasty Plant-Based Recipes.

No-Bake Vegan Chocolate Pie

Yields: Filling for one nine-inch vegan pecan-date pie crust

- 18 oz vegan or dairy-free chocolate chips
- 1 (14-oz) can unsweetened, full-fat coconut milk
- ½ cup almond or cashew butter

Place the chocolate chips in a medium mixing bowl. Spoon the almond butter on top of the chocolate chips. Set aside.

Spoon the entire can of coconut milk into a saucepan. Over medium heat, stir and bring to a simmer until small bubbles form around the perimeter of the pan.

Pour the hot coconut milk over the chocolate chips and almond butter. Make sure all the chocolate is covered with the hot milk. Let it sit for three to five minutes to melt the chocolate.



Whisk by hand until the mixture becomes smooth, shiny and dark. Pour into the prepared crust.

Refrigerate the completed pie until it is firm and ready to serve.

Inspired by and adapted from recipes by Nava Atlas, at VegKitchen.com, Fran Costigan at FranCostigan.com and Ashley Adams, who blogs at TheSpruceEats.com.

Pecan Pumpkin Custard Pie

With no flour, this pie has a softer, more velvety texture. For a thicker filling, simply refrigerate before serving.

Yields: Filling for one nine-inch vegan pecan-date pie crust

- 1 (15-oz) can pumpkin purée
- 1½ cups unsweetened plant milk such as soy or coconut for the creamiest texture
- ¼ cup arrowroot or tapioca starch
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ½ Tbsp pumpkin pie spice
- ½ tsp sea salt
- ⅔ cup Medjool dates, pitted

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

Add all ingredients, except for the starch and dates, into a large pot. Stir well and bring to a simmer.

While the pumpkin mixture is heating, prepare a “slurry” by adding two to three tablespoons of water to the starch in a small bowl. Gently mix together until a thick liquid has formed; avoid clumps.

Add the slurry to the simmering pumpkin mixture and cook over medium heat for five to six minutes, stirring continuously.

Transfer this mixture to a blender or food processor, add in the pitted (unsoaked) Medjool dates and blend until smooth.

Pour the filling into a prepared crust, then bake for 30 to 35 minutes.

Let cool completely before slicing and serving.

Adapted recipe courtesy of Caitlin Shoemaker, of Miami, FL; FromMyBowl.com/pecan-pumpkin-custard-pie.



Vegan Chai-Spiced Sweet Potato Pie

This pie filling is robust with spices and not too sweet. Add less spice and more maple syrup to taste.

Yields: Filling for one nine-inch vegan pecan-date pie crust (recipe, page 33)

- 2 large sweet potatoes
- ¾ cup coconut milk
- 3 Tbsp maple syrup
- 2 tsp vanilla extract

- 2 Tbsp arrowroot or tapioca starch
- 2 Tbsp ground cinnamon
- 1 Tbsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp ground cardamom
- ½ tsp ground nutmeg
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- ½ tsp sea salt

Preheat the oven to 400° F.

Poke a few holes in each sweet potato using a sharp knife.

Place the sweet potatoes directly on the oven rack and bake until very soft, about

45 minutes. Or microwave them for about eight minutes, checking every minute or so after the first five minutes.

Remove from oven and slice the sweet potatoes open to allow the steam to escape. Let them sit a few minutes to cool.

Lower the oven temperature to 375° F.

When the sweet potatoes are cool enough to handle, scoop out the insides and place them into a food processor bowl. Add the coconut milk, maple syrup, vanilla, cornstarch, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, nutmeg, cloves and salt.

Process the filling until smooth, stopping to scrape the bowl as needed. Pour the batter into a prepared pie crust and smooth out the top with a rubber scraper.

Bake about 40 minutes or until it sets.

Remove the pie from oven and allow it to cool completely before slicing.

Top with whipped coconut cream, if desired.

Adapted recipe courtesy of Alissa Saenz, of Phoenixville, PA; Connoisseurus Veg.com/vegan-chai-spiced-sweet-potato-pie.

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