



Pear and Honey Custard Tart

This tart is really easy to prepare, but it is so beautiful that your guest will think it took you all day. We often feature it as our special in the café, where the tart's sweet almond crust has a loyal following.

Makes 1 (10-inch) tart

¼ cup whole almonds
1 recipe Sweet Almond Dough at room temperature
3 cups white wine
¾ cup granulated sugar
3 pears, peeled, halved, and cored
1 cup heavy cream
½ cup honey
2 eggs
2 tablespoons unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon pure almond extract

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Spread almonds on rimmed baking sheet and toast for about 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Let cool, then finely grind in food processor. Set aside for garnishing the tart.

Using your fingers, press the Sweet Almond Dough into a 10-inch tart pan with a removable bottom. Form an even crust, about 1/8 inch thick, over the bottom and all the way up the sides of the pan. (It's important that the crust be the same thickness on the bottom and the sides.) Chill in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.

Line the chilled tart shell with a piece of parchment paper and fill it with dried beans or baking weights. Bake on center rack of oven for 20 to 25 minutes, or until crust is golden brown. Carefully remove paper and beans and set tart shell aside to cool. Leave the oven on.

Combine wine and sugar in a medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes, whisking occasionally. Gently place pears in hot wine, rounded sides down, and poach for 7 to 10 minutes, or until pears are fork-tender. Remove pears with a slotted spoon and set aside to cool. Continue simmering the poaching liquid until it has reduced by half its volume, then set it aside to use as glaze on the finished tart.

Combine cream, honey, eggs, flour, vanilla extract, and almond extract in a medium bowl. Mix well with a whisk.

Place cooled, pre-baked tart shell on a rimmed baking sheet. Slice the poached pears in half again lengthwise and arrange them in the bottom of the tart shell. (At the bakery we like to spread the slices out in a fan-like pattern.) Pour the custard filling over the pears, filling the shell to just below the top. Place baking sheet on center rack of oven and bake for 50 to 55 minutes, or until custard is set and golden brown. Let the tart cool on a wire rack for 30 minutes, then remove the sides of the pan.

Warm the reduced wine glaze over a low heat until it thins, then brush the surface of the tart with a little glaze. Sprinkle ground toasted almonds around the outer edge.

Sweet Almond Dough

This cookie-like dough is easy to make and even easier to work with. Rather than rolling out the dough, you simply press it into the tart pans by hand.

Makes enough dough for 1 (10-inch) tart

¼ cup whole almonds

½ cup granulated sugar

1 ½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

½ teaspoon pure almond extract

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Spread almonds on rimmed baking sheet and toast for about 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Let cool, then finely grind in a food processor. Measure out 2 tablespoons of ground almonds and set aside. (The remaining ground almonds will not be needed.)

Combine 2 tablespoons of the ground almonds, sugar, and flour in a medium bowl and mix with a wooden spoon. In a separate bowl, mix together vanilla extract, almond extract and melted butter. Add butter mixture to the bowl of dry ingredients and mix until coarse and crumbly, using your hands to break up any large lumps. The finished dough will stick together when squeezed between your thumb and forefinger.

At this point, the dough is ready to be pressed into a tart ring. It doesn't need to be chilled. If you're not ready to bake with the dough, pack it into a ball and wrap it tightly in plastic wrap. The wrapped dough can be stored in the refrigerator for 1 or 2 days, or frozen for up to 1 month. It's a good idea to double wrap the dough before freezing it.

Frozen Sweet Almond Dough needs to be fully defrosted before it's used. My preferred method is to transfer the dough to the refrigerator 1 day in advance. Generally this crumbly dough is pressed into tart pans by hand rather than rolled out, but once it has been frozen the dough will be quite firm. In this case, roll the dough out to 1/8 inch thick and fit it into the desired tart man. The dough will probably crack when you lift it, but don't worry. Simply pinch the cracks together with your fingers to repair.