

Pie Dough 101

One of the hardest kitchen tasks for most home cooks is making and rolling out pie dough. Here are some surprising tips on making easy-to-roll-out dough and fitting it to a pie plate. BY CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL

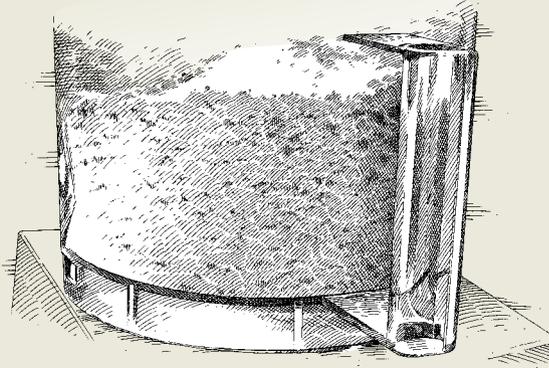
If you have trouble working with pie dough you are in good company, since this is one of the home cook's most difficult tasks. The good news is that most of these problems can be solved with two pieces of advice: use a food processor to finely cut the shortening into the flour, and use plenty of water when forming the dough. Here is a complete illustrated course on how to make, roll, and fit pie dough perfectly. Our dough recipe can be found on page 23.

MAKING THE DOUGH

A food processor is the quickest and best tool for making a pie dough. Have butter cubes and shortening chilled and then proceed without delay. Refrigerate the finished dough for at least an hour before rolling it out.



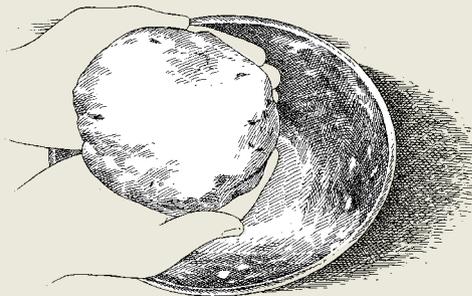
1. Pulse the flour, salt, and sugar in the bowl of a food processor. Add the cold butter and vegetable shortening in small pieces and then pulse until the butter pieces are no longer clearly visible.



2. When the mixture is properly processed, it will be slightly yellow, mealy in texture rather than floury, and it will ride up the sides of the bowl. At this point, transfer the mixture to a separate bowl.



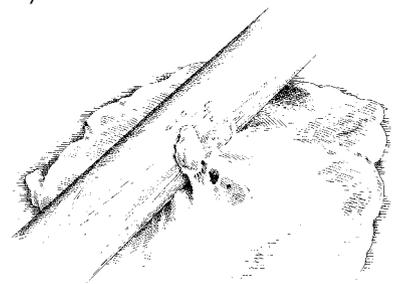
3. Add the ice water bit by bit, tossing and pressing the dry ingredients against the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula. (The amount of water necessary to bring a dough together can vary up to 50 percent depending on how dry the flour is.)



4. Too much water is better than too little—a dry dough cannot be rolled out. The dough should clean the sides of the bowl and be wet to the touch. Form a ball, lightly flour, flatten into a 6-inch disk, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate for at least one hour.

WHAT NOT TO DO

➤ Bakers are fearful of overprocessing the butter chunks. In fact, large or underprocessed butter chunks are more problematic. A dough made with inadequately processed butter pieces will be unevenly hydrated and difficult to roll out. The butter will stick to the rolling pin, the butter chunks will melt, and the dough may tear.



➤ A dough made without enough water will be difficult to form into a disk. It will tear and crumble when rolled out.



➤ The risk of overprocessing is high if water is not added by hand. An overprocessed dough will look like this.

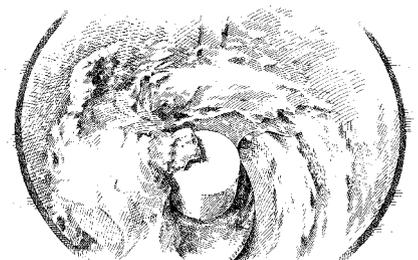
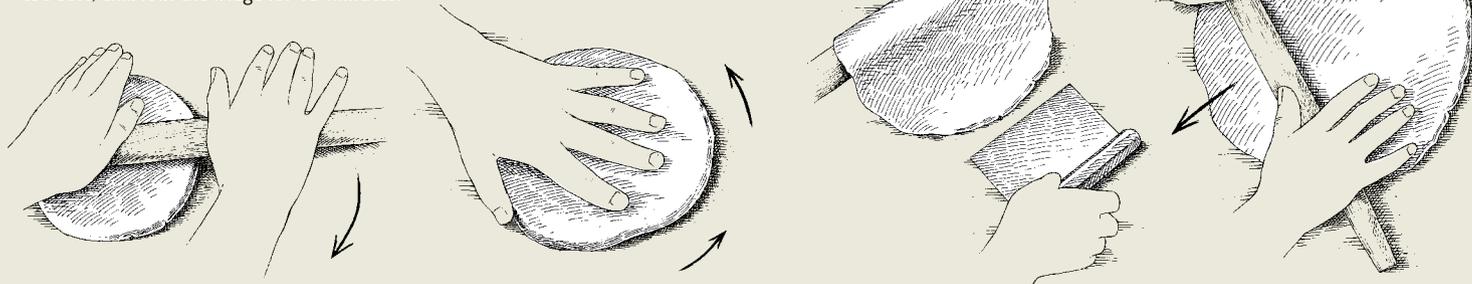


Illustration: John Burgoyne

ROLLING THE DOUGH

The goal when rolling out a pie dough is to get a thin, evenly rolled sheath into the pie pan in one piece quickly—before the dough becomes soft and unworkable. Frequent rotation—and flouring—of the dough will prevent sticking. If the dough is too soft, chill it in the fridge for 15 minutes.



1. Using a tapered pin, roll a quarter turn, from about 2 o'clock to 5 o'clock, keeping your left hand stationary and moving the pin with your right hand.

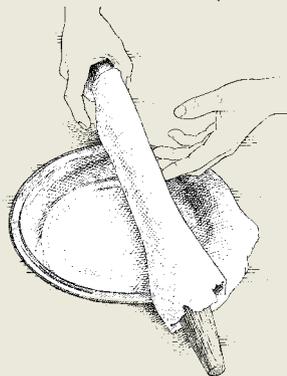
2. Turn the dough a quarter turn and roll again as in step 1. Continue rolling until the dough is too thin to turn easily or when it is 8 or 9 inches in diameter. If necessary, lightly re-flour the work surface.

3. Using a dough scraper, lift the dough onto the rolling pin, pick it up, re-flour the counter, and replace the dough upside down.

4. Roll the dough from the center out and also along the edges to produce a uniform round of dough. The diameter of the circle should be 4 inches wider than the pie plate.

TRANSFERRING THE DOUGH

Once the dough is safely rolled out, it must be transferred to a pan.



Roll the dough over the pin, and unroll it evenly onto the pan.

FITTING THE DOUGH

Correctly fitted dough stays put when it is baked and doesn't shrink.



1. After draping the dough evenly over the pie plate, lift up the edges of the dough and ease it down into the lower creases of the pan. Press lightly to adhere the dough to the sides of the pan.

2. Use scissors to trim the dough overhang to within $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of the outer lip of the pan. (For a two-crust pie, trim the dough to the edge of the plate.)

3. Roll the trimmed overhang under so that it is even with the lip of the pan.

CRIMPING THE DOUGH

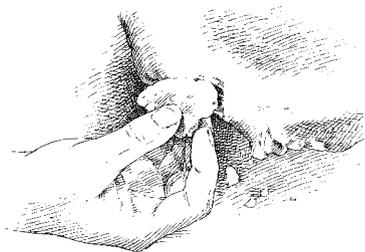
A graceful fluted edge is the crowning achievement of any pie dough. Be sure to chill or freeze the pie shell before baking it to avoid shrinking.



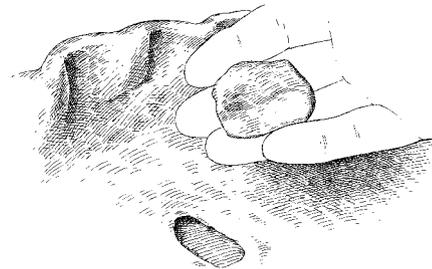
Use the index finger of one hand and the thumb and index finger of the other to create evenly spaced fluted edges. The edge of the dough should be vertical to the edge of the pie plate.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Occasionally, dough has a lopsided fit in the pan or it rips and tears. Here's what to do.



➤ If part of the edge of the rolled dough is too uneven to crimp, roll or flatten a leftover piece from the trimmings and patch it onto the overhang. Roll it under and crimp as usual.



➤ If the bottom dough tears in the pan, roll or flatten a small leftover piece from the trimmings and patch it over the crack. Bake as usual.