

Italian Apple Torta

For the Pastry

4 cups flour
4 tablespoons sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
13 tablespoons unsalted butter
13 tablespoons lard or vegetable shortening
2 cold beaten eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla
6-8 tablespoons ice water

For the Apple Filling

3½ pounds, 8 Granny Smith apples
¾ cup raisins
½ cup pine nuts
1½-1¾ cups sugar
1 heaping teaspoon cinnamon
Pinch of salt
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 tablespoons cold butter
1 egg

For the Pastry

Freeze the unsalted butter and the lard or vegetable shortening. Using a food processor, make ½ of the pastry at a time. (Using the full amount above is too much for most processors.)

Place 2 cups of flour, 2 tablespoons sugar, 1 teaspoon baking powder, ½ teaspoon salt in the processor bowl, and process for 2 minutes to combine the ingredients.

Finely chop or grate 6½ tablespoons each of butter and lard or shortening, and add it to the flour mixture in the processor bowl. Pulse several times just until the mixture resembles very coarse crumbs. You should still be able to see tiny pieces of butter and lard.

Beat 1 cold egg with 1 teaspoon of vanilla. With the processor running, gradually add that beaten egg mixture to the flour mixture. Then gradually add about 3-4 tablespoons of ice water with the processor running. Stop adding water as soon as the mixture starts to come together. You don't want to heat the pastry or over process it.

Remove the pastry from the processor, and set it aside.

Repeat the whole process above with the other half of the ingredients.

Take about ⅓ of the pastry dough from the second half mixing and add it to the first half, making one larger and one smaller piece. Knead each piece briefly and form them into 2 flat disks. Wrap each disk separately in plastic and refrigerate for several hours or, even better, overnight.

To Roll Out the Bottom Pastry

Remove the larger disk from the refrigerator, unwrap it from the plastic, place it on a lightly floured board, and let it rest for about 5-6 minutes so that it won't crack when you roll it out.

Roll out the pastry to fit a 10-inch, 2-inch deep lightly buttered springform pan. This means that your pastry should be rolled out to accommodate the 10-inch diameter bottom, plus 4 inches for the sides, and extra 2 inches for an overhang. That equals about a 16-inch-wide piece of rolled-out pastry.

Very gently fit the pastry into the buttered springform and refrigerate it until needed.

Preparing the Filling

Plump the raisins in hot water, or you could marinate them in a sweet Italian wine such as Marsala or Moscato.

Lightly toast the pine nuts in a 350° oven for about 8-10 minutes, stirring frequently.

Peel the apples, rubbing each one with a piece of lemon as you finish peeling it, so that it doesn't discolor.

Core the apples, cut them into very thin slices, and place them in a large bowl. Mix the sliced apples carefully, but thoroughly, with the lemon juice, the sugar, the cinnamon, and the pinch of salt.

Remove the bottom crust from the refrigerator. Beat the egg and brush the crust, as well as the sides with the egg wash. Drain the raisins from the water or wine.

Place a layer of apples, then sprinkle some of the raisins and pine nuts over them. Continue with another 4 layers of apples with raisins and pine nuts. Cut the 2 tablespoons of butter into tiny pieces and distribute them over the top of the apples. Refrigerate until ready for the top crust.

Preparing the Top Crust

Roll out the top crust to about a 10-inch diameter. Remove the torta from the refrigerator and carefully place the top crust over it. Trim any excess from the bottom crust. Pinch together the two crusts, making certain they are sealed. Roll the pinched crusts into the springform pan and make decorative incisions along the roll with a sharp knife. Brush the top of the torta with the remaining beaten egg wash, and sprinkle the top with a bit of sugar. Cut a small X in the center of the top crust of the torta to allow steam to escape.

Place the torta in the refrigerator until the oven is ready. Place a tray on the bottom rack of the oven and preheat the oven to 425°.

Baking the Torta

Place the torta on the hot tray in the oven and bake for 20 minutes. Lower the heat to 350° and bake another 55 minutes to an hour. If the top crust is getting too brown, place a piece of aluminum foil over it. If it is not browning enough move the torta to the middle of the oven for the last 20 minutes of baking. Let the torta cool a bit, then carefully run a thin-bladed knife around the sides to loosen it before removing the outer ring. Serve warm or at room temperature.