

Lemony Chicken Pot Pies

Serves 8

Pastry

- 2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 lb lard
- 1 Tbsp white vinegar
- 2 eggs (1 for the dough, 1 for brushing the pastry)
- ice cold water

Filling

- 1/3 cup unsalted butter for the sauce, plus extra for the vegetables
- 1/3 cup flour
- 2 1/4 cups chicken stock (plus more if required), ideally homemade
- 1 cup whole or 2% milk
- 1/2 cup 35% cream
- 1/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- 1 1/2 tsp salt (1/2 tsp if using store-bought stock)
- 1/2 tsp finely crushed, dried red pepper (or more to taste)
- 2 cups roasted or poached chicken, diced or shredded into bite-sized pieces
- 1/3 cup unsalted butter for sautéing vegetables
- 1 cup diced onions or shallots
- 3 carrots, peeled and diced 1/4" thick
- 2 celery stalks, peeled and diced 1/4" thick
- 2/3 cup frozen peas, thawed
- salt to taste
- 3 Tbsp fresh herbs, finely minced: parsley, dill, chives, tarragon, thyme (use one or a combination of herbs)

Special Equipment

- 8 oven-proof ramekins or one terrine
- Parchment paper
- Plastic wrap

Pastry

Place the flour and salt in a large bowl and mix well. Cut the lard into 1 – 2” pieces and add it to the flour mixture. Using two knives or a pastry blender, cut the lard into the flour until the mixture resembles coarse breadcrumbs. The mixture should not be uniform; it’s best to have some larger pieces of flour-coated lard along with the finer particles.

In a 1 cup measure, combine 1 egg with the vinegar and add enough cold water to equal 1 cup. Gradually stir in half of the liquid into the flour. Add only enough water to make the dough cling together.

On a lightly floured sheet of parchment, shape the dough into a disk and gently roll it into a circle approximately 1/2” thick. Cover with plastic wrap and chill for at least 30 minutes before using. Continue to roll out the pastry dough, starting in the centre, to a thickness of approximately 1/8”. Cut the pastry into rounds that are about 1/2” larger than your ramekins. Cut small holes or vents into each circle. Stack the pastry rounds, with a layer of parchment between each, in plastic freezer bags and store in the refrigerator or freezer until ready to use. Pastry, wrapped in plastic, can be stored in the freezer for 6 – 8 weeks.

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Filling

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat. Whisk in the flour and cook for a few minutes, stirring constantly, until the flour and butter mixture is golden in colour (this is called a “roux”). Add the chicken stock, milk and cream to the roux and whisk until heated through and mixture starts to thicken; this will take several minutes. Continue whisking to ensure there are no lumps. The sauce should be thick enough to lightly coat the back of a spoon. Add the lemon juice, cheese, salt and crushed red pepper. If the mixture is too thick or heavy, add a bit more stock.

Seasoning the sauce is the most important part of the recipe so be patient – taste it frequently and fine-tune it with additions of salt, lemon juice and freshly ground pepper. (If the sauce tastes good before you add the chicken and vegetables, imagine how great it will taste when all of the ingredients come together!)

Vegetables

To ensure each vegetable is properly cooked, it's best to cook each variety separately. (Carrots, after all, take longer to cook than celery.) Heat one large spoonful of butter in a large saucepan and add the diced shallots or onions with a pinch of salt. Cook until transparent, adding more butter if necessary. Repeat the process with the celery and carrots, seasoning each lightly with salt and taking care not to overcook them. The frozen peas do not need to be cooked.

Add the cooked vegetables, peas, diced chicken and freshly minced herbs to the sauce. Taste the mixture and season, if necessary, with additional salt, lemon juice and pepper.

Assembling The Pot Pies

Remove the pre-cut pastry from the fridge or freezer (if frozen, thaw before using). Place your ramekins on a baking sheet and fill each one with the creamed chicken and vegetable mixture. Brush the rims of the ramekins with the beaten egg. Place the pastry rounds on top of the ramekin and press the edges down with your fingers, crimping the pastry as you do so. Cut vents into the pastry, if you have not already done so. Brush the top of the dough with the remaining egg.

Bake the pies until the chicken mixture is bubbly and the pastry is browned, approximately 25 – 30 minutes.

Note: If you freeze unbaked pies, allow them to thaw in the refrigerator before baking them.