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Tarte Tatin Toujours

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Honeycrisp Apple Line-up Photos Susie Iventosch

of preference and making a pie crust adds time to the preparation, where using the puff pastry makes this dish even easier to prepare.

Plan on about 45-55 minutes to caramelize the apples on the stove top, and roughly 20-25 minutes for the final baking of the tart with the crust. The long caramelizing process allows the apples to become permeated with the caramelized sugar flavor.

The recipe I found called for Golden Delicious apples, but my friend tipped me off to a new variety of apple that has emerged on the market recently. The Honeycrisp apple is amazing - tart and sweet at the same time and very, very crunchy. I found it to hold up very well to the cooking and baking, too. Honeycrisp apple trees were derived from a cross of Macoun and Honeygold at the University of Minnesota apple breeding program in 1960. The University was looking to develop winter hardy cultivars with high fruit quality. In 1991, the plant was released for commercial propagation and is now available globally.

Mike Billecci, produce manager at the Orinda Safeway, allowed me to taste this wonderful apple before I decided to make my purchase and I was sold in an instant! He said the Honeycrisp they carry is grown in Washington State, and Safeway has been carrying them for the past three years or so.

"We also carry organic Honeycrisp as well as the regular variety," he said. "We have them on special from time to time, so it's good to look through our weekly store specials."

The regular Honeycrisp sells at Safeway for \$2.99 per pound, and \$2.49 per pound on special, while the organic normally sells for \$3.59 and \$2.99 on special. These prices may seem high compared to the Granny Smiths' regular \$1.99 per pound price, but I must say, they are worth it! You can always mix "apples and apples" in the tart to save a few cents. I did and it worked just fine. According to Billecci, there are more than 200 varieties of apples in existence today, so you have plenty to choose from!

One more thing to note, different varieties of apples contain slightly different water content, so if your dish takes a little more or less time to caramelize, this may help to explain it!

The farmers' markets are in full apple mode these days, too, and you can find any number of varieties from different vendors.

Sources: Who Cooked That Up? <http://members.cox.net/jjschnebel/cookin.html>,

www.whatscookingamerica.net, <http://honeycrisp.com/honeycrisp.html>

If you've never made a Tarte Tatin, you really must! They are very easy, and incredibly delicious, with a caramelized sugar-apple mixture topped by golden-browned pastry.

According to popular food folklore, the dish originated in the Loire Valley of France in the small, rural town of Lamotte-Beuvron. There the two Tatin sisters, Caroline and Stephanie, owned and operated l'Hotel Tatin in the late 1800s. Stephanie ran the kitchen, and her caramelized apple tart was said to melt in the mouth.

One day, during the particularly busy hunting season, Stephanie was in a rush and accidentally placed the sugar and apples in the bottom of the pan first, forgetting to line the dish with pastry. After realizing the omission, she quickly adapted, placed the crust on top, and tossed it in the oven. Thus was born the Tarte Tatin.

From this day forward, the dish became famous throughout France and according to some historians, it really gained in popularity once Maxim's of Paris secured the recipe and placed it on their menu! It is said, Maxim's sent a chef-spy to the Tatin sisters' hotel, disguised as a gardener, to learn the secret of this divine concoction.

Most Tarte Tatin recipes call for butter, apples, sugar and one sheet of frozen puff pastry, but I prefer to use pie crust instead and to add a touch of spice, usually cinnamon and cardamom. It's just a matter



Tarte Tatin during the stove top caramelizing process

1/4 cup (half stick) unsalted butter

2/3 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon (optional)

1/4 teaspoon cardamom (optional)

8 apples, peeled, cored and quartered

Melt butter in a 10-12 inch diameter oven-proof pan with sloping sides.

Add sugar (and spices) and cook for a few minutes, stirring occasionally, until sugar melts. Cover the bottom of the pan with apples, cut side up, snuggled closely together into the sugar mixture.

Double layer them, to accommodate all of the apple quarters.

Cook slowly over medium heat about 45-55 minutes until apples become tender, but not mushy, and juices in the pan are caramelized to a golden brown, even a slightly brownish color in places. Keep an eye on the heat, so it doesn't get too hot and burn, nor too cool to stop the caramelizing process. You really don't need to stir, but I push the apples into the sugary mixture with a wooden spoon occasionally.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Roll out pastry sheet (or pie dough) to just under 1/4-inch thick and cut into a circle to fit over apples in pan. Tuck edge of pastry down into pan, covering apples completely. Bake about 20-25 minutes, or until crust is golden brown and puffed.

Remove tart from oven and immediately invert onto a plate, using two very thick pot holders! Grasp both plate and pan with hot pads, and turn them over together. Slowly lift the pan from the plate as the apples drop down over the pastry. You may need to tap the bottom of the pan a bit, to loosen all of the apples.

Serve warm with a dollop of whipped cream, crème fraîche or vanilla ice cream.

Pie Crust Recipe

2 cups flour

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

2 teaspoons cider vinegar

1/2 cup ice water

Mix flour and salt in a large bowl. With a pastry cutter, or fingers, crumble butter into flour until well integrated. Sprinkle cider vinegar over mixture and stir in well with a fork. Add ice-cold water, a little at a time and blend with fork until dough is moist enough to roll into a ball, but not too wet. Roll into one large ball for the pie crust and a smaller ball to use for patching your crust, or cinnamon roll ups for snacking!



Finished Tarte Tatin Photo Susie Iventosch

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