

Caramel Baked Apple Dumplings

Time: Two, three hours over two days: make the dough and caramel syrup the first day; dumplings the second

Like a cupcake, a dumpling is round and generous, self-contained and messy, both more and less disciplined than a “slice” of anything. (In fact the word dumpling is so appealing it makes a “slice” sound almost mean.) But unlike a cupcake, a dumpling wraps itself around a secret, luscious filling—in this case a cinnamon-sugar dredged apple. Apple dumplings have been a chief part of Kay’s (Glenn’s wife) Thanksgivings since childhood—Southern Germany by way of rural Indiana, with her Grandmother’s deft touch. They were always baked in brown sugar syrup and slumped in their bowls like great, dozing matrons. The apples were tart, the cinnamon woody, the pastry tender, the syrup sweet. Served warm, with a spoon, they were pretty much unassailable.

We have resurrected this dessert using Anson Mills’ gorgeous new pastry flour, a crisp-tender pastry with many layers, the ethereally scented Macintosh apple (autumn’s creamy baking apple), and a caramel syrup. And, truthfully? They are even better than we remembered.

Equipment Mise en Place

To make the dough you will need a digital scale, food processor, a rubber spatula, and a bench knife.

To prepare the apples you will need a small mixing bowl, a large mixing bowl, an apple corer, an apple peeler and a small sharp knife.

To make the caramel you will need a clean, dry heavy-bottomed, medium saucepan; a wooden spoon; a fine conical strainer; and a quart-sized glass container, such as a 4-cup glass measure.

To make the dumplings you will need a pizza stone, a rolling pin, parchment paper, a 15-inch ruler, a small sharp knife or pizza cutter, a shallow 3-quart baking dish, such as a 9 by 13-inch Pyrex, and a pastry brush.

Ingredients

for the pastry

9.4 ounces (2 cups) Anson Mills Fine Cloth-Bolted Pastry Flour

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt

14 tablespoons (7 ounces) cold, unsalted

Cooking Remarks

This pastry recipe, a standard pie dough with “turns,” can also be called a semi-puff pastry. Semi-puff has the virtue of being simpler to execute than classic puff pastry while producing exquisite flakiness and a bit of lift that gets close to the real deal. Close enough for us. The turns also give the dough unflappability in terms of handling. Each full turn involves rolling the dough out into a long rectangle, folding it across itself into thirds, and repeating the process. The dough will show chunks of butter at the early stages and look scraggly and ragged. But with successive turns it will become easier to work with and progressively tidier.

As with all of Anson Mills heirloom flours, this pastry flour hydrates slowly. The initial rough dough may feel dry, but resist the impulse to add additional water.

We like Macintosh apples for this recipe for a number of reasons: Macs sing with sweet and zing with tart. They perfume the whole kitchen and bake to a lush creaminess. If you’d prefer another baking apple—one that remains firmer throughout baking—by all means use it.

European-style butter, cut into 12 pieces

5 to 7 tablespoons iced water

for the filling

1 cup granulated sugar

1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon

6 tablespoons juice from 3 large, juicy lemons

8 small (no larger than 5 ounces) or 4 large Macintosh apples (around 7.7 ounces)

for the caramel syrup

1 1/2 cups (10.5 ounces) granulated sugar

1/2 cup spring or filtered water, hot

for the baking dish

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

to brush the apples

2 tablespoons milk or cream

Directions

1. To make the dough: Place the flour and salt in a food processor bowl and pulse to combine. Scatter the butter pieces over the top and process to a coarse meal, about 6 1-second pulses. Dump the contents of the food processor onto a clean, dry counter. Make a well in the center of the butter-flour mixture. Add 5 tablespoons ice water to the well. Toss the dry ingredients and ice water together with your fingertips and fluff lightly. If the dough feels dry, sprinkle it lightly with additional water and fluff. Use up to 7 tablespoons water altogether. Use the heel of your hand on the dough and short forward thrusts against the counter top to bring wet and dry ingredients together. Scrape together with a bench knife and repeat. You will have a rough dough. Flour the work surface lightly and roll the dough into a rough rectangle 5-inches wide by 7-inches high. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate 20 minutes.

2. Sprinkle flour lightly over the counter. Unwrap the dough, sprinkle the top lightly with flour and roll it out into a rectangle 7-inches wide by 14-inches high. Fold the top third of the dough down and the bottom third of the dough up to create a rectangle,

The 6-inch pastry squares we call for in this recipe are the perfect size for 4 or 5-ounce whole apples. Working with 7 ½ or 8-ounce apples? Fine: you'll need 4 apples instead of 8. Core and peel the big guys and cut them in half. It works perfectly.

European-style butter, butter that weighs in at around 85% butterfat (as opposed to standard supermarket butter (which weighs in at 80%), contributes less water and thereby increased extensibility to pastry dough. It is essential to producing this pastry. A number of European-style butters, many of them made domestically, are available in supermarkets like Whole Foods. We find unsalted Plugrá the most reliably fresh and tastiest European-style butter in wide distribution in the United States.

Rapping cold dough smartly with a French rolling pin to soften it and shape it before you begin rolling it is perfectly okay—in fact we recommend it.

which, when turned with the open side on the right, looks like the pages of a book and measures 5-inches wide by 7-inches high. Flour the counter very lightly and repeat the process. Use a bench knife to block the sides of the dough. Re-wrap the dough in plastic and refrigerate it at least 20 minutes. You have completed two turns. Repeat this process two more times. You have now given the dough 6 full turns. Refrigerate it for several hours or overnight before proceeding with the recipe.

3. To make the caramel: pour the sugar into a clean, dry heavy-bottomed, medium saucepan. Turn the heat to medium-high and allow the sugar to melt without stirring. When a band of colored sugar (caramel) appears bubbling along the edge of the saucepan, begin to stir the white, raw sugar on the top into the melted caramel base with a wooden spoon. Reduce the heat to medium-low and continue stirring from time to time to incorporate the unmelted sugar into the caramel. This might take as long as 20 minutes—don't rush it. When the sugar has completely melted, the caramel will have a glassy, deep amber sheen and show no granularity. Remove the saucepan from the stove and pour the hot water into the caramel. Stand back: it will bubble like mad. Stir with a wooden spoon to allow the caramel to absorb the addition of water. Return the saucepan to low heat to dissolve any caramel clinging to the bottom of the saucepan or to the wooden spoon, 4 or 5 minutes. Strain the syrup through a fine conical sieve into a glass measuring cup or a bowl. You will have about 1¼ cups. Cover and set aside at room temperature until ready to use.

4. To roll out the pastry: Cut a sheet or two of parchment into 8 8-inch squares. Set them aside. Remove the dough from the refrigerator and whack it sharply with a rolling pin to flatten it slightly. Cut the dough in half and return one half to the refrigerator. Roll the other half out on a lightly floured surface into a 12 by 12-inch square, taking care to roll evenly from the center to the edges of the dough. Use a ruler and a pizza cutter or a small, sharp knife to cut the dough into 4 squares. Stack the squares on 4 sheets of parchment respectively (don't worry if the squares of dough are imperfectly shaped or thicker in some parts than others—you'll be able to correct that later), stack them on top of each other on a plate and put the plate in the refrigerator. Roll the other half of the dough out the same way and cut 4 more dumpling squares. Stack them on parchment and refrigerate them along with the first four.

5. Adjust the oven racks to the lowest and upper middle positions. Place a pizza stone on the lower rack and heat the oven to 425 degrees.

6. To prepare the apples: Combine the sugar and cinnamon in a small mixing bowl and mix well. Pour the lemon juice into a large bowl. Working one apple at a time, trim the bottom of an apple to make sure the apple sits levelly on the counter. Thrust the apple corer through the center of the apple and then draw it out, removing the core. Push the core from the center of the corer and discard it. Use the corer to remove any remaining core or seeds from the center of the apple. Peel the apple and toss it in the bowl with

the lemon juice, turning to coat the apple with juice. If the apples are large cut them in half before tossing them in the lemon juice. Repeat with the remaining apples, tossing them one by one into the bowl with the other apples and the lemon juice, and turning them to coat. Set them aside.

7. Brush the bottom and sides of a shallow 3-quart baking dish (such as a 9 by 13-inch Pyrex) with melted butter and set it on a shelf in the refrigerator.

8. To make the dumplings: The dough will now be cold and easier to work with. Reshape each pastry square one at a time directly on the parchment with the goal of achieving a 6-inch square: use the rolling pin to straighten edges or even the thickness, or a pizza cutter and ruler to trim straggly edges. When you are satisfied with the pastry square, roll an apple around in the cinnamon sugar, coating it well, then stand the apple in the center of the dough. (If you're using apple halves, roll the half in sugar and place it flat-side down on the pastry square.) Clean and dry your fingers. Lift two corners of the dough up snugly around the apple at its base and twist it into a point at the top. Pinch and roll the sides seams to seal. Repeat with the other two sides. When the dough is closed around the apple on all four sides, you can crimp the edges a bit with your fingers and curl the lower corners into little points. Place the finished dumpling in the prepared baking dish and go on to the next. Once the dumplings are made you may choose to decorate them with little leaves: roll the leftover dough scraps into a sheet, and chill briefly; then cut leaves from the sheet, etch them with a small knife, wet the leaf backs lightly, and arrange them on the dumplings. Brush the dumplings with milk or cream.

9. To bake the dumplings: Place the pan in the oven directly on the stone and bake until the dumplings are golden and fragrant, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove the baking dish from the oven; pour the caramel in between the dumplings and, using oven mitts, tilt the baking dish to coat the bottom evenly. Return the baking dish to the upper oven shelf and bake until the caramel is bubbling and the dumplings are well browned, about 5 minutes more. Remove from the oven and cool slightly. Serve warm with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Makes 8 dumplings