

## Not Exactly Pumpkin Pie

**Time:** An hour and a half to bake the squash and process it; ten minutes to make the filling, about 1 ½ hours for baking.

Don't think we've gone rogue by using squash in our pumpkin pie. A pumpkin is just a squash with a cute name; but a butternut squash puts pumpkin to shame when it comes to pies. Think of the average pumpkin pie: dense, gluey, vegetal, almost bitter. An army of dried spices can't rescue that. Canned pumpkin might be the culprit: No great pie filling starts in a can.

But butternut squash is better even than a classic pie pumpkin. Besides its delicate tremor and satiny mouthfeel, butternut squash offers advantages based on its physicality alone: its long, elegant neck is all virgin flesh unfettered by seeds or webbing, and its relative paucity of slippery round contours makes the initial knife work far less precarious. Additionally, butternut squash is widely available and instantly recognizable as an eating squash—you never have to wonder “would this be better for carving?” (We've made pies with pumpkins that really should have been jack-o'-lanterns—even those labeled “for pies.”)

## Equipment Mise en Place

To make the filling you will need a 12 x 15-inch rimmed sheet pan, parchment paper, a food processor, a rubber spatula, and a quart-sized liquid measuring cup—or similarly sized pitcher. To bake the pie you will need a pizza stone and a cooling rack.

## Ingredients

*for the filling*

1 3-pound butternut squash, scrubbed

2 large eggs plus 2 egg yolks

1/2 cup dark brown sugar

1/4 cup granulated sugar

1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract

1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt

1 ½ teaspoons ground ginger

1 ½ teaspoons ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

Pinch cayenne pepper

1 ¼ cups heavy cream

## Baking Remarks

It's the long neck of a butternut squash that prompted us to reconsider how to cook it. Instead of baking the neck as a single piece, we chose to slice it, skin-on, so the flesh would cook more quickly and dry out in the oven. The skin is easily removed with a paring knife when the squash is finished.

You may cook and purée the squash a day or two in advance of using it in the pie. The squash may also be frozen for up to two months before using.

We shouldn't have to say this, but we've been in some of our friends' cupboards lately and feel compelled to offer a comment: for the filling to be really first rate, the spices should be fresh—fresher than last Thanksgiving, at the very least.

Time the baking of the crust with the preparation of the filling—it is important to fill the pie shell while it is still hot.

*for the pastry*

1 Recipe Pastry for Cream or Custard Pie, rolled out, chilled, and ready to blind bake

## Directions

- 1.** To bake the squash: Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Line a 12 x 15-inch rimmed sheet pan with parchment. Using a chef's knife with a nicely balanced and sturdy blade, slice off the stem end, then cut through the squash horizontally where the bulb begins. Cut each piece in half lengthwise. Working one length at a time, lay the neck pieces flat-side down on a cutting board and cut through the skin into inch-thick half moon slices. Arrange them close together on the sheet pan. Scrape the seeds and 'cobwebs' from the bulb ends and discard. Cut the bulb ends into 1-inch thick slices and arrange them on the sheet pan. Cover the pan with aluminum foil and bake, checking occasionally, until the squash is tender, about an hour. Remove the foil and bake until the slices dry (but don't brown), turning once, 30 to 40 minutes more. Remove from the oven; cool slightly, then trim the skin away with a paring knife. Process the flesh in a food processor until smooth. You need 1 ½ cups or 11 ounces of purée—packed. (If you're making the purée in advance, refrigerate it in an airtight container until needed.)
- 2.** Make the filling: Purée the squash a food processor until smooth. You need 1 ½ cups or 11 ounces of purée--packed. Turn into a bowl, cover and refrigerate until ready to use.
- 3.** Adjust an oven rack to the lowest position. Place a pizza stone on the lower rack and heat the oven to 425 degrees for at least one hour.
- 4.** Bake the piecrust directly on the stone to set the dough and brown the crust, 25 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 300 degrees. Carefully remove the foil and beans and continue to bake until crust has dried out and the crimped edges have colored, 5 to 10 minutes more.
- 5.** While the crust bakes, prepare the filling: spoon in the squash into the food processor and process briefly. Add the eggs, sugar, vanilla, spices and salt, and process until smooth. With the machine running, pour the heavy cream through the tube and process to combine. Scrape the filling into a quart-sized liquid measuring cup or similarly sized pitcher. Pour the filling into the hot, pre-baked shell. Bake the pie directly on the pizza stone until the filling is set two-thirds in from perimeter of the fluted edge and the center still jiggles, 50 to 60 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool to room temperature on a rack.

**Makes 1 9-inch pie**