

World Class Chicken Pot Pie

Time: This recipe is a two-day proposition. We're not going to lie to you. First day: active prep time 15 minutes, plus an hour to cook the chicken, 30 minutes to cool it, 15 minutes to pick the meat, and an hour to simmer the stock. Second day, 40 minutes to make the velouté, 40 minutes to roll out the dough and fit the molds, and 40 minutes total time to bake.

Chicken pot pie has no negative introjects. Warm, luscious, buttery, crisp, and satisfying as only pastry crowning a rich, hearty stew can be, our memories of pot pies are held in a fuzzy, protective penumbra that goes straight back to childhood: to the grade school cafeteria, to Grandmother's kitchen, to the take-out pie shop. Some of the actual pies of our childhood may have been pretty awful. But they possessed the comfort quotient—and something else most contemporary pot pies have lost: a bottom. Today, when your fork plumbs the depths of a silky pot pie filling, it clatters into metal or porcelain—not into a lush, upholstered bottom crust. There's a phrase for this kind of compromise and it begins with the word "half-." A pie, by definition, does not always have a top crust; but it always has a bottom.

We're taking the long way home with this recipe—which is the only way chicken pot pie becomes truly memorable—by making a classic velouté from rich chicken stock, our pastry flour, and an aromatized bolt of white vermouth. The filling's attendant vegetables are roasted if they benefit from dry heat, while those that favor moist heat, are not. The poached chicken, which has been taken from the bones just as it was done and not hours later, remains silky and moist. The pies have both top and bottom crusts, sublimely flaky and flavorful.

If we wanted someone to fall in love with us, we would bake that person a stout, handsome little pie with an elegant filling and a crust like this one. These pies are also very pleasing dinner party fare.

Hey, so listen, we failed to mention one important aspect of this recipe: where we use fat, we use chicken fat. Schmaltz. It is animal fat, yes; it is saturated, yes. But it brings sublime chicken flavor to the velouté or gravy. Schmaltz is the thing that will make your pie filling unforgettable. If you cannot bear to use chicken fat, fine. Use olive oil.

Equipment Mise en Place

To cook the chicken and make the stock you will need a heavy, non-reactive 5 or 6-quart stockpot; a set of tongs; a rimmed sheet pan; a fine, footed colander or conical strainer; a large mixing bowl; and a wooden spoon.

Baking Notes

Try to avoid over the hill root vegetables with thick waistlines and weathered skin. Go for the slim, youthful diameter in carrots, parsnips and leeks. Not only will the vegetables look prettier, but they will likely be sweeter and more tender, too.

We prefer individual pies because they are neat and tidy to serve, and because everyone gets the same amount of crust and filling. No landslide to fret over where the crust slides off sideways and some hapless soul gets only filling, and so on. We purchased a number of different individual forms for our baking trials, including some made of porcelain and cast iron. But our favorite by far was a simple, inexpensive 4-inch miniature pie tin. The bottom crust bakes perfectly and the pie is deep enough to accommodate a full cup of filling. Plus, the whole finished pie can be lifted out and served all of a piece, looking gorgeous. Made by Fox Run, these pie tins are available in many hardware stores, including Ace hardware.

We were frankly thrilled to find a 6-inch Ateco cookie cutter that happens to be the perfect diameter for both top and bottom crusts. It has a thin, sharp cutting blade and

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To make the pot pie filling you will need a medium saucepan; a roasting pan; a large Dutch oven; a wooden spoon; a couple of mixing bowls; and a whisk.

To roll out the dough you will need a rolling pin; a 15-inch ruler; 8 4 ¼-inch by 1-inch deep individual pans or other similarly sized individual molds; a wooden toothpick or skewer; 3 pounds of dried beans for blind baking; 2 12- by 15-inch rimmed sheet pans; a pastry brush, and a pair of kitchen shears.

Ingredients

For the chicken and chicken stock:

1 4-pound organic chicken, washed, liver and gizzard reserved for another use; neck bone, if present, along for the ride

2 medium yellow onions, diced

2 small or 1 large carrot(s), peeled and chopped into ½-inch lengths

1 celery rib, chopped into ½-inch lengths

4 garlic cloves, peeled

6 large sprigs fresh or 1 ½ teaspoons dried thyme

1 Turkish bay leaf

Handful of fresh parsley stems

12 cups spring or filtered water

For the filling:

Chicken stock

Reserved chicken

8 tablespoons or more chicken fat or olive oil

Fine sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

3 slender parsnips (8 or 9 ounces total weight), peeled, straggly rattails snipped off, and cut into ½-inch rounds (about 1 ¼ cups)

3 slender carrots (8 or 9 ounces total weight), cut into ½-inch rounds (about 1 ¼ cups)

8 ounces small button mushrooms, wiped clean, stems trimmed, and quartered (about 2 cups)

4 slender leeks (about 10 ounces total weight), cleaned well, white and light green

performs its job perfectly.

This super-sized cutter proved difficult to find online, however, and is not part of the Ateco cutter set. But our friends Kerry and Riege at Vermont Kitchen Supply in Manchester, where we discovered both the 4-inch tins and the giant cutter, promised to lay in a supply of both for our readers who wish to buy them. Give them a call if you're interested (802) 362-0111.

You will note that the bottom crust is completely baked before it is filled and covered with the top crust. The one thing to remember when working with baked and unbaked pastry together is that the bottom crust must still be slightly warm in order to give purchase to the unbaked top crust. We use an egg wash around the perimeter of the bottom crust to assist in that process.

We found it prudent to bake the pies 4 at a time on one sheet pan to give them adequate airflow. The two racks, two sets of pies strategy worked for the blind baking, but was clumsy and difficult once the pies were filled. The pies can all be baked in advanced and reheated for service with no loss of quality. They freeze well, too.

If you wish to bake a large, single pie, our recommendation

part sliced into rounds (about 2 cups)

2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme

½ cup dry vermouth

4 ounces (about ¾ sifted cup) Anson Mills Fine Cloth-bolted Pastry Flour, *sifted*

For the pastry:

1 Recipe Flaky Lard and Butter Pastry

3 tablespoons soft butter for greasing the molds

1 egg beaten with 2 teaspoons of water and strained through a tea strainer into a small bowl

Working Ahead

Plan to work with this recipe in stages. For instance, if you cook the chicken, pick the meat from the bones and simmer the stock on the first day, the second day's velouté will be quite manageable. Similarly, if you may make the pastry on the day you cook the chicken, roll it out, stamp it into rounds and freeze the rounds overnight between parchment layers, putting the pies together on the second day will be manageable.

Directions

1. *Cook the chicken and make the stock:* Combine the chicken neck (if using), the onions, carrots, celery, garlic, thyme, bay leaf, parsley stems, and water in a heavy, non-reactive 5 or 6-quart stockpot. Place the chicken breast-side up in the pot and bring the liquid to a simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and simmer gently until the chicken legs pull easily from the carcass, about an hour. Remove from the heat and cool at room temperature for 20 minutes.
2. Using tongs, transfer the chicken from the pot to a rimmed sheet pan. When it is cool enough to handle, pull the meat from the bones and chop it into pieces that will fit on a spoon. You should have about a pound and a quarter—or slightly more—meat. Salt and pepper the chicken lightly while it is still-warm. Cover and refrigerate. Return the bones to the stockpot, bring the stock to a simmer over medium heat, and simmer gently until it is rich, flavorful, and reduced to a generous 7 cups--about an hour. Strain the broth through a fine, footed colander or conical strainer into a large mixing bowl. (It is helpful to take a cup yield of the stock to have a baseline volume upon which to base the following day's reduction.) Refrigerate it overnight.
3. *Reduce the stock:* Lift the congealed fat or schmaltz from the top of the stock with a spoon—some stock will cling to the schmaltz, but this is fine. There will be

would be for a 9- or 10-inch cast iron skillet. But we didn't test it, so we can't offer any details, unfortunately.

To make these pies with leftover turkey, use identical proportions of meat, vegetables, flour and stock.

anywhere from 3 to 5 ounces, depending on the chicken. Set it aside. Pour the stock into a medium saucepan and bring it to a simmer over medium-high heat. Simmer for about 15 minutes until 6 cups of stock remain. Keep hot.

4. *Roast the vegetables:* Heat the oven to 475 degrees and place an empty roasting pan on a middle rack. Toss the parsnips and carrots together in a mixing bowl. Melt the chicken fat over low heat in a Dutch oven. Tilt the pot, and spoon 1 ½ tablespoons of fat onto the vegetables. Sprinkle them with ¼ teaspoon salt and several grinds of fresh pepper and toss to coat them with the fat. Roast the vegetables, tossing occasionally, until they are just soft and have begun to color, 15 to 20 minutes, depending on their size. While they are roasting toss the mushrooms in a bowl with 1 ½ tablespoons of schmaltz, ¼ teaspoon salt and several grinds of pepper. Transfer the roasted parsnips and carrots into a mixing bowl and turn the mushrooms into the roasting pan. Roast, tossing occasionally, until they lose their juices and begin to color, about ten minutes. Remove the roasting pan from the oven and transfer the mushrooms to the bowl with the carrots and parsnips.

5. *Make the velouté:* There should be 4 or 5 tablespoons of schmaltz remaining in the Dutch oven. Cook the leeks in the schmaltz, covered, over low heat, stirring occasionally, until they soften, about 5 minutes. Transfer the leeks to a bowl with a slotted spoon, leaving the schmaltz in the Dutch oven. If there does not appear to be enough fat in the pot to cook the flour, add a tablespoon or so additional. Stir the flour into the pot, and cook, stirring with a wooden spoon until the flour is golden, about 3 minutes. Add a ladle of hot chicken stock to the roux and whisk vigorously. It will thicken quickly. Add the remaining hot stock, whisking constantly to prevent lumps. Stir in the vermouth. Season the sauce with 1 to 1 ¼ teaspoons of salt and ½ teaspoon or more of freshly ground black pepper and simmer gently for 5 minutes. Return the leeks to the sauce. Add the reserved chicken, the roasted vegetables and the minced thyme. Taste for seasoning. Set the filling aside or refrigerate it, covered, overnight.

6. Clear some space in your refrigerator and set a 12- by 15-inch rimmed sheet pan on one shelf. Butter the 8 small pie pans or molds and set aside.

7. *Roll out the pastry bottoms and line the pans:* 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. With a 6 inch cutter stamp out 4 rounds of dough and fit them snugly into the greased pans or molds. If the dough balloons out, prick it with a toothpick or wooden skewer. Work quickly so the dough does not become warm, transferring the 4 pans to the refrigerator. Gather up the dough, flour the

counter lightly and roll out the dough to stamp out 3 more rounds. Fit them into the pans. Roll out the last bit of dough, stamp out a final round, and line the last pan. Refrigerate.

8. *Roll out the pastry tops:* Remove the second piece of dough from the refrigerator and repeat the process described in Step 7, rolling and stamping out the 8 6-inch rounds that will become the top crusts of the pies. Stack the 8 rounds between pieces of parchment or plastic wrap and refrigerate them.

9. *Blind bake the bottoms:* Adjust the oven racks to the lower and upper middle positions and heat the oven to 400 degrees. Line the chilled pastry shell bottoms with 8 6-inch square pieces of aluminum foil and fill each pan with about a cup of dried beans. Place 4 lined pie pans on each sheet pan and bake for 15 minutes, moving the sheet pans between oven racks and rotating them front to back halfway through. Remove the sheet pans from the oven and lift off the aluminum foil and beans gently.

10. While the bottom crusts are baking, return the filling to the stove and heat it to warm over low heat.

11. *Fill and top the pies:* Fill 4 of the still warm pie pans with a cup each of filling and brush the edges of the dough with egg wash. Place a round of dough over the top of each pie and roll the edges under slightly to meet the edges of the bottom crust. Crimp. Brush the top crusts with egg wash and snip a vent into the top of each pie. Arrange the 4 finished pies on a rimmed sheet pan. Move an oven rack down to the middle position and return unfilled baked pans to the oven for 30 seconds just to warm the crusts. Bake the first 4 pies until the tops are golden brown and the filling is hot, about 15 minutes. While the first 4 pies are baking, fill and top the next 4 pies. When the first 4 pies are finished, remove them from the oven, and bake the second set of pies. Cool the finished pies for 10 minutes in the pans, then gently lift the pies from the pans. The first set of pies may be rewarmed briefly after the second set comes out of the oven, or they may all be baked in advance and rewarmed.

Makes 2 quarts of filling; 8 individual pot pies