



ANSON MILLS

Coconut Cream Tart with Toasted Meringue

Yield

One 9-inch tart

Time

Overnight to steep the coconut, about 30 minutes to make the pudding, at least 3 hours to chill the tart, then about 40 minutes to make, pipe, and toast the meringue

Baking Notes

We got the best flavor delivery for the filling by steeping a generous amount of sweetened coconut flakes overnight in half-and-half before straining the cream and cooking it into a lightly sweetened coconut pudding. A bag of Baker's Angel Flake sweetened coconut weighs 7 ounces. We save one-half ounce of it to toast for the topping. Over the course of testing we developed a strong preference for cornstarch from Pure Organic Ingredients—available on Amazon.com—for its reliably beautiful, satiny creams. Very fresh eggs laid from chickens that have a nice life and lay eggs with marigold yellow yolks make an enormous difference in the quality and color of the pastry cream, as well. But to achieve the sheen and velvety mouthfeel of a classic cream pie filling, the pastry cream must be boiled on the stove for 1 minute. “Boil” here means big, lazy bubbles bursting on the surface continuously as a whisk moves through the pudding to keep it smooth and prevent things from getting out of hand. A touch of pure coconut extract well-balanced with vanilla completes the perfect flavor finish.

If your pastry shrinks during baking, the shell may not accommodate all of the coconut filling. But don't worry, it won't go to waste. Put the extra into a small bowl, cover, refrigerate, and spoon away in secret.

Whipped cream is, of course, an obvious and excellent alternative to the toasted meringue trim featured here. But it must be whipped and added right before serving or the cream will lose its loft and the tart won't keep as well. To make whipped cream, using a stand or handheld mixer, beat 12 ounces cold heavy cream, 1.2 ounces sugar, and ½ teaspoon vanilla extract to soft peak. Swirl it onto the tart, then finish with the toasted coconut.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a digital kitchen scale; a large, deep, narrow bowl; a fine-mesh strainer; a large heavy-bottomed saucepan; a medium bowl; a whisk; a silicone spatula; parchment paper; a small rimmed baking sheet; a small heavy-bottomed saucepan; a stand mixer with a spotlessly clean bowl and an equally clean whisk attachment; a digital instant-read thermometer; a pastry bag fitted with a small star tip; a thin metal spatula; and a culinary torch.

Ingredients

for the filling

6.5 ounces sweetened shredded coconut
30 ounces half-and-half
¼ teaspoon fine sea salt
2.8 ounces sugar
5 ounces egg yolks
1 ounce cornstarch
1 ounce cold unsalted European-style butter, cut into 2 pieces
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
¾ teaspoon pure coconut extract

1 recipe Essential All-Butter Pastry 2.0 or Graham Pâte Sucrée, fitted into a 9-inch tart pan with removable bottom, fully baked, and cooled

for the toasted coconut and meringue toppings

0.5 ounces sweetened shredded coconut
4 ounces sugar
1 ounce filtered or spring water
2 ounces egg whites
⅛ teaspoon cream of tartar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Directions

1. *Make the filling:* Turn the coconut into a large, deep, narrow bowl. Pour in the half-and-half and stir. Cover tightly and refrigerate overnight.

2. Set a fine-mesh strainer over a large heavy-bottomed saucepan and strain the coconut-infused half-and-half into it; press firmly on the solids to extract every drop of cream. Discard the coconut or save it for another use (it can be returned to crispness in a 200-degree oven, but much of the flavor and sweetness has been expressed in the cream). Knock any remaining coconut out of the strainer and replace it over the now-empty bowl; set aside. To the saucepan, add the salt all but 1 tablespoon of sugar, then warm the liquid over medium heat until it begins to steam, stirring occasionally to dissolve the sugar.

3. In a medium bowl, whisk the egg yolks. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon sugar and whisk until the sugar dissolves. Add the cornstarch and whisk until velvety and glossy, about 30 seconds. Increase the heat under the half-and-half to medium-high and bring it to a simmer. As soon as it simmers, pull the saucepan to the side of the burner and, while constantly whisking the yolk mixture, gradually ladle in about one-third of the hot half-and-half. Now whisk the yolk mixture into the half-and-half in the saucepan, scraping the bowl with a silicone spatula. Slide the saucepan over medium heat and cook, whisking vigorously and continuously, until the mixture thickens and bubbles burst on the surface, 5 to 10 seconds. Reduce the heat to medium-low, but continue to simmer the pastry cream, whisking vigorously, for 1 minute; it will be thick and

glossy. Immediately pour the pastry cream into the strainer, knocking the side of the strainer with a wooden spoon or spatula to pass the filling through. Add the butter, vanilla, and coconut extract, then whisk until the butter is fully incorporated. If the pastry shell is not already on a baking sheet, set it on one. Scrape the hot filling into the shell, smooth the surface, and cover flush with parchment paper, followed by plastic wrap. Refrigerate the tart on the baking sheet until cold and set, at least 3 hours.

4. *Toast the coconut for the topping:* Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 200 degrees. Distribute the coconut on a small rimmed baking sheet and toast until golden brown, 20 to 30 minutes, stirring two or three times. Let cool completely on a wire rack.

5. *Make the meringue:* In a small heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the sugar and the water; set the pan aside. Place the egg whites in the spotlessly clean bowl of a stand mixer fitted with an equally clean whisk attachment. Whip on medium-low speed until frothy, about 15 seconds. Add the cream of tartar. At this point, set the saucepan over medium heat and bring the sugar mixture to a simmer, occasionally swirling the pan to help dissolve the sugar. As soon as the syrup reaches a simmer, begin beating the egg whites on medium-high speed and continue to beat just until the whites hold soft peaks, no longer. When the sugar syrup registers 245 to 248 degrees, drizzle it into the egg whites as you beat them on medium-high speed. After all the syrup has been added, continue to beat the meringue on medium-high speed until it is glossy, voluminous, and holds soft peaks, about 5 minutes; add the vanilla as they whip. The meringue will still be slightly warm. Do not overbeat!

6. Turn the meringue into a pastry bag fitted with a small star tip. Remove the chilled tart from the refrigerator and uncover it. Remove the outer ring from the tart pan. Slip a thin metal spatula between the tart pan bottom and the bottom of the pastry crust, then slide the tart shell onto a flat serving plate. Pipe the meringue in individual star shapes in concentric rings on the surface the filling. Pass a lit culinary torch over the tips to brown them. Sprinkle with the toasted coconut.