

APPLE GALETTE

The fruits of summer may be gone, but autumn brings us great apples and pears. And one of my favorite desserts is an apple galette. A galette is almost the same thing as a tart, except that a tart is made in a flan ring or quiche pan, whereas a galette is free-form. It's kind of like a fruit pizza. It's great for company, because it can be made ahead of time, keeps well, and is served at room temperature.

First, make a pate brisee, which is a standard French pastry dough made with butter. Here's how to do it. Set up your food processor, and into the bowl put in 3 cups all-purpose flour, ½ teaspoon salt, and 2 sticks of unsalted butter, very cold, and cut with a knife into thin slices or even shavings. Blend quickly using the on and off switch, until the butter is just cut into the flour. Then, with the motor running, pour in about ¾ cup of ice water, and blend for a few seconds, until the dough just starts to come together. The pieces of butter should be still visible.

Scoop the dough onto a piece of plastic wrap and push together into a ball. Cut the ball in half, and wrap one half in plastic wrap and refrigerate or freeze it for another use. With the remaining half, roll the dough between 1/8th and 1/16th of an inch thick, into a large more-or-less round that will fit on a cookie sheet, using flour underneath and on top so the dough doesn't stick to your board or the rolling pin. It doesn't have to be perfectly round. When the dough is thin enough, roll it onto your rolling pin and unroll it on a cookie sheet. If you want the dough thinner, you can roll it out a little more directly on the cookie sheet.

Preheat your oven to 400 degrees. Peel five large Granny Smith apples, cut them in half, core them, and slice each half into quarter-inch slices crosswise. Chop the smaller end slices coarsely, and sprinkle the chopped apple over the dough. Arrange the larger slices on the dough, beginning at the outside, approximately 1 to 2 inches from the edge. Stagger and overlap the slices to imitate the petals of a flower.

Cover the dough completely with a single layer of the apples, except for the border you've left on the edges. Place the smaller slices in the center to resemble the heart of your flower. Bring up the border of the dough and fold it over the apples. Sprinkle the apples with ¼ cup of sugar and dot with about three tablespoons of unsalted butter, cut into small pieces. Bake the galette in your preheated 400 degree oven for about 65-75 minutes, until the galette is really well-browned and crusty. Be careful not to use too much apple, and don't let your dough get too thick.

Slide the galette onto a board or a large platter. Dilute four tablespoons of apricot jam with one tablespoon of water or brandy, and carefully spread the jam over the warm galette with the back of a spoon, like painting it, including the crust on the border. Serve the galette lukewarm or at room temperature, cut into wedges.

If apples aren't your thing, you can make a pear galette. Simply substitute some peeled firm ripe pears, like the bosc variety for the apples. You'll need five or six depending on the size. And instead of glazing the galette with thinned apricot jam, use black current or seedless raspberry jelly instead.

For an even easier apple dessert, with a melon baller simply scoop out the cores of six large unpeeled apples. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees. With the point of a knife, make an incision in the skin all the way around the apple, about a third of the way down, and about ¼ inch deep. This keeps the apple from bursting as it bakes. Put the apples in a gratin dish or other ovenproof dish pretty enough to come to the table.

Mix together 1/3 cup of apricot jam and 1/3 cup of maple syrup. Coat the apples with this mixture, and dot each apple with a pat of unsalted butter, about ½ tablespoon each. Bake in the preheated 375 degree oven for 30 minutes, baste with the accumulated juices, and bake for another 30 minutes or so for an hour total. Let cool a little bit before serving, and top each apple with a dollop of sour cream. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.