

## Thanksgiving and the New England Pie

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"Ah! On Thanksgiving day, when from East and from West  
From North and from South come the pilgrim and guest,  
When the gray-haired New Englander sees round his board  
The old broken links of affection restored,  
When the care-weary man seeks his mother once more,  
And the worn matron smiles where the girl smiled before;  
What moistens the lip and what brightens the eye?  
What calls back the past like the rich pumpkin pie?"

John Greenleaf Whittier

**Many Thanksgiving culinary traditions** date only from the Victorian customs of the 19th century. The pie, however, has been a staple of New England dinner tables since the days of the earliest settlers.

**Pie was a popular English dish**, brought to America by colonists. American taste in pies remained traditional, rooted in English cuisine and using English-style ingredients. America's pumpkins resembled European squashes, cranberries resembled tart European berries. Apple seeds were imported from England and orchards planted. Ingredients for mince meat could be found both in England and America.

**The first cookbook** written by an American and using specifically American ingredients was Amelia Simmons' 1796 ***American Cookery***. Her recipes include the pies that we still consider Thanksgiving traditions: apple pie, pumpkin "pudding" baked in a crust, minced meat pie and cranberry tart.

"**There were pies in preparation** by the score; mince pies and apple, and cranberry, and squash, and pumpkin... There was flour dust on almost every thing; especially when the pie crusts were rolling out, and the tarts were being made... My aunt never pretended to bake less than sixty pies of a Thanksgiving time; and I have often seen an exact hundred standing thickly all over the tables."

***Dovecote; or,  
the Heart of the Homestead***  
by George Canning Hill, 1854.



## Thanksgiving and the New England Pie: Pie Crust

**No matter the filling**, all pies share one characteristic: crust, also known as paste, pastry, dough, shell (for an undercrust) or lid (for a top crust).

**The most basic form of pie crust** is made of flour and shortening. The ingredients are combined and the crust then rolled or molded into the desired shape. The edges are often decoratively "crimped."

**Pie pastry is notoriously difficult** to make. In her 1890 *Boston Cook Book*, Mrs. Lincoln prefaced four pages of directions with these words of warning:

"It requires practice to make puff paste well, and there are so many other dishes more easily made and vastly more important, it is better not to waste time and strength upon it. Let your ambition as a housekeeper soar higher than perfection in making puff paste. But those who *will* have it may observe the following directions."

**For centuries, shortening was animal fat:** lard, butter, suet and meat drippings (in descending order of use).

**Lard is hog's fat**, obtained by boiling or rendering. Pure lard is white and free of disagreeable taste or smell. Lard has been commercially available, packed in distinctive buckets, since the mid-1800s. Many recipes still call for lard for the flakiest pie crusts.





**Health reformers of the 1880s** sought lard substitutes. A large lard producer, the Fairbanks Company, was among the first successful innovators. "Cottolene" was 90% cottonseed oil and 10% beef tallow. Opaque, solid and white, it was packed in buckets like lard. Cottolene was heavily advertised, appealing to the public's fascination with "genteel" and labor-saving convenience foods.

**Once Cottolene broke the "lard barrier,"** the stage was set for the introduction and immediate popularity of Crisco, an opaque, solid, white, all-vegetable shortening introduced by Proctor & Gamble in 1911.

"**Can any one tell** who first imprisoned our luscious fruits in a paste of grease and flour, baptized the thing with fire, and named it pie? And why is this pie a necessity? That is what confounds me...

**Alas for the poor woman** chained to the rolling-pin! Her sentence is for life."

*The Schoolmaster's Trunk* by Abby Morton Diaz, 1875.

## **"PASTE" (pie crust) RECIPE - 1859**

**from: *The Young Housekeeper's Friend*. By Mrs. Cornelius.  
Boston: Taggard & Thompson, 1859.**

**Three pounds** (or quarts) of flour, half a pound of lard, and a pound of butter.

"**It is difficult to make** flaky crust in warm weather. But cooling the butter and water with ice, and having the pastry-table in the cellar will insure tolerable success."

# CRISCO'S APPLE PIE - 1913

from: *The Story of Crisco.*

Cincinnati: The Proctor & Gamble Company, 1913.

**For filling for a medium-sized pie tin**, use 3 cups pared and sliced apples, ½ cup sugar, 1/8 teaspoon salt, 1 tablespoon Crisco, ¼ teaspoon cinnamon, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, and grated rind of ½ lemon.

## Plain Crisco Pastry

1 1/2 cupfuls flour

1/2 cupful Crisco

1/2 teaspoonful salt

Cold water

Sift flour and salt and cut Crisco into flour with knife until finely divided. Finger tips may be used to finish blending materials. Add gradually sufficient water to make stiff paste. Water should be added sparingly and mixed with knife through dry ingredients. Form lightly and quickly with hand into dough; roll out on slightly floured board, about one-quarter inch thick. Use light motion in handling rolling-pin, and roll from center outward.

"**Hundreds of instances of Crisco's healthfulness** have been given by people, who, at one time have been denied such foods as pastry, cake and fried foods, but who **now** eat these rich, yet digestible Crisco dishes."

## Thanksgiving and the New England Pie: Sugar & Spice

**In the 17th and 18th centuries, North America's sugar** was imported from British sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean. The sugar was packaged in large cones that weighed about 10 pounds each. Housewives cut the cones into smaller chunks and pounded the sugar into granular form as needed. Molasses was a lower cost by-product of sugar refining and used widely.

**A 1630 list of provisions** that settlers to New England were advised to bring included sugar, cloves, cinnamon, mace and nutmeg. These spices, with the addition of ginger and allspice, represent those traditionally used in Thanksgiving pies. All these spices are tropical in origin and highly regarded because of their expense and scarcity.

**North America's spices** were imported from the islands of the Indian Ocean, the Pacific and the Caribbean.

Spices were transported whole to minimize damage during shipping and were





ground after delivery, either by the local middleman or by the housewife.



**By the late 19th century,** commercially prepared and packaged spices had become available. Adulteration of spices was common, however, and "purity" a genuine concern.

**The spices most commonly used in Thanksgiving pies are:**

**Cinnamon** - the spicy bark of young branches of a tree native to the East Indies.

**Mace** - the inner covering of the nutmeg, flattened and dried.

**Ginger** - the root-stock of a reed-like plant that grows in all tropical climates.

**Allspice** - the dried fruit of a small Caribbean tree.

**Cloves** - the dried flower buds of an evergreen native to the East Indies.

**Nutmeg** - the dried kernel of the fruit of a tree that grows in all tropical climates.

"For as much as a week beforehand, 'we children' were employed.. in pounding cinnamon, allspice and cloves in a great lignum-vitae mortar... In those days there were none of the thousand ameliorations of the labors of housekeeping which have since arisen - no ground and prepared spices and sweet herbs; everything came into our hands in the rough, and in bulk, and the reducing of it into a state for use was deemed one of the appropriate labors of childhood."

*Oldtown Folks*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1869.

## **SPICED PUMPKIN PIE - 1858**

from: *The Skillful Housewife's Book* by Mrs. L.G. Abell.  
New York: A.O. Moore, 1858.

**Pare and stew the pumpkin** soft, let it remain over the fire, stirring it often until quite dry. When cool strain through a sieve or fine cullender, and add milk about one quart to one of pumpkin. Let it warm, after they are strained together, then add molasses or sugar, a little salt, nutmeg, cinnamon, or lemon, with a spoonful of ginger and an egg or two with a handful of flour. Bake in a hot oven nearly an hour.

"...keep your peppers, spice, cinnamon, cloves, &c., ground, put up in bottles, labelled and corked, that you may have them always ready for immediate use."

# SUGAR & SPICE APPLE PIE - 1865

from: *An American Family Cook Book*, by a Boston Housekeeper.  
New York: Oliver S. Felt, 1865.

**Take eight russetings**, or lemon pippin apples; pare, core, and cut not smaller than quarters; place them as close as possible together into a pie-dish, with four cloves; rub together in a mortar some lemon-peel, with four ounces of good moist sugar, and, if agreeable, add some quince jam; cover it with puff paste; bake it an hour and a quarter.

"...it is best to begin by weighing out the ingredients, sifting the flour, pounding and sifting the sugar and spice, washing the butter, and preparing the fruit.... spice should be pounded in a mortar, except nutmeg, which it is better to grate."

## Thanksgiving and the New England Pie: Pumpkin Pie

**Pumpkin and squash were known** in England. Early recipes for English pumpkin pies prescribe layers of sliced, spiced and fried pumpkin, combined with sugar and eggs.

**Pumpkins supply a great deal of food** for a very small farming effort. The American colonists soon made them a staple of their diet. According to a satirical ballad written in 1774 (but which may have originated as early as the 1640s)

"We have pumkin at morning and pumkin at noon,  
If it was not for pumkin we should be *undoon*."

**Americans developed their own style** of pumpkin pie. Unlike the sliced English version, American pumpkin pie was a pumpkin custard, sweetened and flavored with spices, baked in a pastry shell.





"The feeling of a boy towards pumpkin-pie has never been properly considered. There is an air of festivity about its approach in the fall. The boy is willing to help pare and cut up the pumpkin, and he watches with the greatest interest the stirring-up process and the pouring into the scalloped crust. When the sweet savor of the baking reaches his nostrils, he is filled with the most delightful anticipations."

*Being a Boy* by Charles Dudley Warner, 1878.

## "POMPKN PUDDING" - 1796

from: *American Cookery*, by Amelia Simmons. 1796.

**Pompkin Pudding No. 1.** One quart stewed and strained, 3 pints cream, 9 beaten eggs, sugar, mace, nutmeg and ginger, laid into paste No. 7 or 3, and with a dough spur, cross and chequer it, and baked in dishes three quarters of an hour.

**Pompkin Pudding No. 2.** One quart of milk, 1 pint pompkin, 4 eggs, molasses, allspice and ginger in a crust, bake 1 hour.

**Paste No. 7:** Rub one third of one pound of butter, and one pound of lard into two pound of flour, wet with four whites well beaten; water q.s. [*quantum sufficit* or as much as suffices) to make a paste, roll in the residue of shortening in ten or twelve rollings - bake quick..

## PUMPKIN PIE - 1847

from: *The New England Economical Housekeeper* by Mrs. E. A. Howland.  
Worcester: S.A. Howland, 1847.

**Take out the seeds** and pare the pumpkin; stew, and strain it through a coarse sieve. Take two quarts of scalded milk and eight eggs, and stir your pumpkin into it; sweeten it with sugar or molasses. Salt it, and season with ginger, cinnamon, or grated lemon-peel, to your taste. Bake with a bottom crust. Crackers, pounded fine, are a good substitute for eggs. Less eggs will do.



"This work has been compiled with a careful regard to the most economical mode of preparing the various dishes for which directions have been given."

## MRS. O'S PUMPKIN PIE - 1855

from: *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book* by Catherine Beecher.  
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855.

**One quart of strained pumpkin**, or squash.  
Two quarts of milk, and a pint of cream.  
One teaspoonful of salt, and four of ginger.  
Two teaspoonfuls of pounded cinnamon.  
Two teaspoonfuls of nutmeg, and two of mace.  
Ten well-beaten eggs, and sugar to your taste.

**Bake** with a bottom crust and rim, till it is solid in the centre.

## PUMPKIN PIE - 1878

from: *Practical Cooking & Dinner Giving* by Mrs. Mary F. Henderson.  
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878.

**Pare a small pumpkin**, and take out the seeds; stew it rather dry, and strain it through a colander; add two quarts of milk, three eggs, and three table-spoonfuls of molasses; let the remainder of the sweetening (to taste) be of sugar; season it with two table-spoonfuls of ground cinnamon, one of ginger, and two teaspoonfuls of salt.

"**Pumpkin pies** are, in almost all parts of New England, regarded as quite a luxury. The common method of making the crust renders them objectionable... Nor is it, after all, very nutritious."

Food reformer William A. Alcott in  
*The Young Housekeeper, or  
Thoughts on Food & Cookery*, 1838.

### **William A. Alcott's healthful pumpkin pie:**

"To one quart of stewed and strained pumpkin, add one quart of new milk, and sweeten it to your taste. For the crust, take wheat meal, wet with buttermilk to a sufficient stiffness to roll out. Bake it in deep dishes."

## PUMPKIN PIE

Four maids of a housekeeping turn are we,  
With implements ready for work you see,

Spoons and pans and a long recipe  
For the making of pumpkin pies.

Stir and stir, til you stir long enough,  
Roll the crust so it won't be tough,  
Daintily season it - this is the stuff  
For the making of pumpkin pies.

Cover the tins with the flaky crust,  
Sprinkle the pie with cinnamon dust,  
There's science and skill, and art, I trust,  
In the making of pumpkin pies.

*A New Speaker for Our Little Folks*  
by Laura Augusta Yerkes, 1902.

## Thanksgiving and the New England Pie: Mince Meat Pie

**Heavily seasoned pies** of minced meat, suet, and dried fruits were popular in Elizabethan England, particularly at Christmas time. The English settlers brought a liking for mince meat with them to America. Pilgrims and Puritans did not celebrate Christmas, however, and mince pies soon became associated with the new New England holiday - Thanksgiving.

**Lean beef**, either sirloin or ox-tongue, was generally preferred as the minced meat. It was discovered that, if brandy was added and if the minced meat was not added until just before cooking, the mix of suet, fruits and spices would keep for months. Later mince pies sometimes omitted the meat altogether.

"Mince-meat was chopped, and seasoned, and tasted, and chopped, and seasoned, and tasted, till all the various blissful flavors were merged in the one, perfect, resultant, crowning flavor which pronounced the work complete. No little hard bits of apple, cold and crisp, no sudden surprises in the way of morsels undoubtedly from the animal kingdom, but a perfect chaos, without organization and subject to no laws of classification. What are mince pies for? What enemy of mankind first prompted their composition?... Mrs. Murray gave herself no trouble on this score. She held to mince-pies, as to baked beans on Saturday, as a fixed institution, not to be subverted."

"Thanksgiving" by S.G.B.  
in *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1863.



"For days and days before Thanksgiving the boy was kept at work evenings, pounding and paring and cutting up and mixing (not being allowed to taste much), until the world seemed to him to be made of fragrant spices, green fruit, raisins and pastry - a world that he was only yet allowed to enjoy through his nose. How filled the house was with the most delicious smells! The mince-pies that were made!"

*Being a Boy*  
by Charles Dudley Warner, 1878.

## MINCED PIE OF BEEF - 1796

from: *American Cookery*, by Amelia Simmons, 1796.

**Four pound boil'd beef**, chopped fine, and salted; six pound of raw apple chopped also, one pound beef suet, one quart of Wine or rich sweet cyder, one ounce mace, and cinnamon, a nutmeg, two pounds raisins, bake in paste, three fourths of an hour.

**Observations:** All meat pies require a hotter and brisker oven than fruit pies, in good cookeries, all raisins should be stoned.

## MINCE MEAT PIE - 1847

from: *The New England Economical Housekeeper*, by Mrs. E. A. Howland.  
Worcester: S.A. Howland, 1847.

**Boil a piece of lean fresh beef** very tender; when cold, chop it very fine; then take three times the quantity of apples, pared and cored, and chopped fine; mix the meat with it, and add raisins, allspice, salt, sugar, cinnamon, and molasses, to suit the taste; incorporate the articles well together, and it will improve by standing over night, if the weather is cool; a very little ginger improves the flavor.

**Small pieces of butter**, sliced over the mince before laying on the top crust, will make them keep longer.

## MINCE PIE - 1859

from: *The Young Housekeeper's Friend* by Mrs. Cornelius.  
Boston: Taggard & Thompson, 1859.

**To one beef's tongue**, allow a pound of suet, a pound of currants, another of raisins, a pound and a quarter of sugar, half a pound of citron, eight large apples, a quart of wine or boiled cider, salt, a nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, the juice and pulp of a lemon, and the rind chopped fine.

**Let the meat be chopped very fine**, then add the apples and chop them fine also. Put the sugar into the cider or wine, and just boil it up so as to skim off the top; let it stand a few minutes, and then pour it off into a pan containing all the other ingredients. Be careful, in pouring it, not to disturb any sediment there may be from the sugar.

## "RICH" MINCE MEAT PIE - 1860

from: *The American Practical Cookery-Book* by A Practical Housekeeper.  
Philadelphia: J.W. Bradley, 1860.  
from: *Thanksgiving & the New England Pie.*

**Three pounds of tender lean beef**, a pound and a half of suet, half as much prepared apple as meat, two pounds of chopped raisins stoned, two pounds clean currants, two pounds sugar, two cups molasses, one gill rose-water, the rind and juice of four lemons, one pint of wine or brandy, salt, mace, cloves, cinnamon, black pepper, ginger, two tablespoon-fuls extract vanilla. Chop the meat, suet and apples, very fine. Add to them the raisins and currants. Then dissolve the sugar in the brandy, and mix thoroughly together all the remaining ingredients. Fill a deep plate with a rich paste; fill, cover and bake.

"**Mince pies are always made** with covers, and should be eaten warm."

"**These mince pies**, when made in the best manner, are bad enough; but when made up not only with lean meat, but with the addition of suet, spices, raw and dried fruits, wine, brandy, &c., and put into the usual forms of pastry, they become ... an abomination."

Food reformer William A. Alcott in  
*The Young Housekeeper or Thoughts on Food & Cookery*, 1838

## Thanksgiving and the New England Pie: Apple Pie

**Apples are not native** to North America. They have, however, been cultivated from antiquity in Europe. During the 17th century, over 200 varieties of apples were being grown in England. Cooked apples were preferred to raw for eating, and apple pie was very popular.

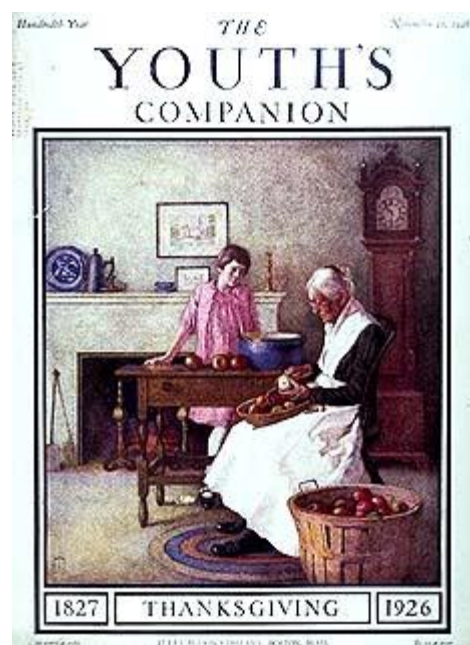




Soon after their arrival in America, the English colonists planted apples. These new orchards were producing fruit as early as the 1630s. Apples were dried, stewed, jellied, used in cider, and baked in pies.

"As the day approaches, the bustling within doors is greatly increased. Minced pies, apple-pies, pumpkin-pies, custards, cranberry-tarts, and the whole array of pastry and preserves, protected from dust and flies by white linen napkins, take the places on the long shelves of the wonted shining pewter."

*Sketches of New England, or Memories of the Country*  
by John Carver, 1842.



## APPLE PIE - 1796

from: *American Cookery*, by Amelia Simmons, 1796.

### APPLE PIE - 1796

**Stew and strain the apples**, to every three pints, grate the peel of a fresh lemon, add cinnamon, mace, rose-water and sugar to your taste - and bake in paste.

### A BUTTERED APPLE PIE - 1796

**Pare, quarter and core tart apples**, lay in paste, cover with the same; bake half an hour, when drawn, gently raise the top crust, add sugar, butter, cinnamon, mace, wine or rose-water.

# AN "EXCELLENT" APPLE PIE - 1855

from: *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book* by Catherine Beecher.

New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855.

from: *Thanksgiving & the New England Pie*.

**Take fair apples, pare, core, and quarter them.** Take four tablespoonfuls of powdered sugar to a pie. Put into a preserving pan, with the sugar, water enough to make a thin syrup; throw in a few blades of mace, boil the apple in the syrup until tender, a little at a time, so as not to break the pieces. Take them out with care, and lay them in soup dishes. When you have preserved apple enough for your number of pies, add to the remainder of the syrup, cinnamon and rose water, or any other spice, enough to flavor it well, and divide it among the pies. Make a good paste, and line the rim of the dishes, and then cover them, leaving the pies without an under crust. Bake them a light brown.

"**We are fond of pies** and tarts. We cry for pie when we are infants. Pie in countless varieties waits upon us through life. Pie kills us finally...

**How can a person** with a pound of apples and fat dough in his stomach feel at ease?"

"Concerning Restaurants" by C.W. Gesner in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1866.

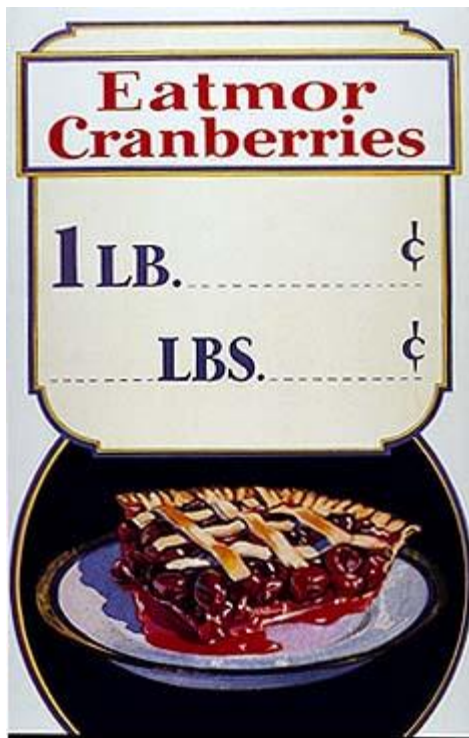
## Thanksgiving and the New England Pie: Cranberry Tart

**Native Americans introduced** the American cranberry to the English settlers. Cranberries, however, would not have been completely unfamiliar. A small variety of cranberry, known as a "Marsh Whort," is found in England and an herbal known to be in the library of *Mayflower* passenger Myles Standish described the plant.

**Cranberries were part** of the New England diet by 1650. According to John Josselyn's 1672 *New Englands Rarities Discovered*,

"The Indians and English use them much, boyling them with Sugar for Sauce... Some make tarts with them as with Goose Berries."

Most directions for cooking cranberries, whether 17th century or 20th century, are still simply "boil them with sugar."



"**Flour and dough**, and plates and pans. So many sleeves rolled up, so many white arms made whiter with flour dust. Such pleasant South Sea smells of spices, and such clouds of irresistible steam and odors. ... And large pans of stewed pumpkin, strained through sieves, and colored richly with milk that blankets itself, every night, with cream. And dishes of cranberry, all prepared for its deft transmutation into tarts."

*Homespun; or,  
Five and Twenty Years Ago*  
by Thomas Lackland, 1867.

## **CRANBERRY TART - 1796**

from: *American Cookery*, by Amelia Simmons, 1796.

**Stewed, strained and sweetened**, put into paste No. 9, and baked gently.

**Paste No. 9:** Rub half a pound of butter into one pound of flour, four whites beat to a

foam, add two yolks, two ounces of fine sugar; roll often, rubbing one third, and rolling two thirds of the butter is best; excellent for tarts.

## **CRANBERRY PIE - 1891**

**from: *The Table* by Alessandro Filippini.  
New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1891.**

**Put one quart of fresh cranberries** in a saucepan with a gill of cold water and three ounces of powdered sugar; place on a hot stove, stir lightly with the spatula, and let cook for fifteen minutes. Remove from the fire, and rub through a sieve into a vessel, then pour it into a lined pie-plate. Place it in the oven, and let it bake for twenty minutes, then take it out, and let cool thoroughly, and finish by decorating it exactly the same as for lemon cream pie meringue; return it to the oven for ten minutes, then serve.

## **CRANBERRY PIE - 1897**

**from: *Hood's Practical Cook's Book*.  
Lowell, MA: C.I. Hood & Co., 1897.**

**Line a plate with a plain paste** and fill with stewed sweetened cranberries, scatter sugar over the cranberries and cover with strips of paste placed across parallel in two directions to form diamonds.

"**Pie is the great American delicacy** in the pastry line, and our foreign friends are prone to poke fun at us because of our supposed fondness for it. It is assumed to be somewhat more of a sectional than a national weakness, however, and the 'pie line' is usually located somewhere north and east of New York."