

Szarlortka (Polish apple pie)

Essentially, just apple filling between two layers of shortcrust pastry (kruche ciasto).

Shortcrust Pastry (kruche ciasto)

Ingredients

700	g	All purpose flour	
400	g	Butter	
100	g	Sugar (fine granulated) ¹	1/3 cup
5		Egg yolks (extra large)	
1-3		Eggs whole	

Recipe:

1. Place flour in the food-processor bowl. Add sugar. Mix briefly to homogenize/aerate.
2. Add butter, cut into small cubes. Butter should be cold and somewhat stiff but not really hard.
3. Process on medium until butter is thoroughly mixed with flour and sugar. The mixture should look like grated parmesan.
4. Transfer the mixture into a large bowl and add egg yolks. Mix and knead by hand² until eggs are thoroughly incorporated and the dough forms crumbly lumps. Add the remaining whole eggs and continue kneading, but make sure not to overwork the dough.
5. Form three approximately equal size balls by pressing the dough like making snowballs. Once formed, transfer the balls onto a cutting board and press them against it from all sides to form rectangular blocks.
6. Wrap the blocks in plastic wrap and place them in the refrigerator for at least an hour or until ready to bake (can be kept for a few days).

¹ Powdered sugar could be used, but it usually has starch added to it, which may change the character of the pastry. Do not use coarser sugar, as it will not completely dissolve in the pastry. If in doubt, you can grind sugar in the food processor before adding flour.

² Egg yolks can be added and mixed in the food processor, but usually the dough still requires kneading by hand to make the dough uniform, and then to compact it into blocks. Add whole eggs one at a time, and stop when the dough can be formed into blocks. Adding too many eggs will make the dough too pliable and result in hard crust when baked.

Apple Filling

Ingredients

- 2-5 kg Apples (whatever fits in the pot)
1.5 cups Water (if there is more apples add a little more water up to two cups)

Recipe:

1. Wash and peel apples³ and cut them in halves. To remove seeds, you can use a melon baller. Cut out hard parts and skin remainders from both ends. You can core the apples, but it wastes some of the usable parts.
2. Cut the apples into 1 – 1 ½ inch pieces.
3. Put the cut apples into a pot (big enough to contain all of them) and add 1 ½ - 2 cups of water.
4. Put the pot on medium-low heat and cook stirring every few minutes, especially towards the end. Make sure the apples do not caramelize on the bottom. It usually takes 40-50 minutes, after which essentially all water from the bottom should have evaporated.
5. Remove from heat and let cool. The filling can be stored in the fridge until ready to bake, or frozen for longer storage.

Baking Szarlotka

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. If stored in the fridge, remove the apple filling to the counter to allow it to warm up. If frozen, take it out the previous day. The filling should be at room temperature before baking.
3. Take one block of the dough at a time and using a sharp knife cut it into slices about 4 mm thick.
4. Cover the bottom of a 9"x13" and about 2" deep baking pan with the slices of dough (some overlapping is ok). Use small pieces of dough cut from the bigger slices to cover any gaps, particularly those where the corners of the slices do not quite meet. Press these pieces of dough with fingers to fuse all the pieces of dough on the bottom of the form, so that there are no gaps and the dough is evenly thick. You can use a small roller (like a pizza roller) to even out the layer of the dough.
5. Using slightly thinner dough slices cover the sides of the baking pan, again filling any gaps with small pieces of dough. Make sure that the joint between the bottom and side layers doesn't have any gaps. At this point you should have a little more than one block of the dough left.
6. Using a fork, poke some holes in the bottom layer of the dough. This will help prevent the dough from buckling up.
7. Place the baking pan with dough in the preheated oven, and bake for 15-20 minutes, or until light golden. Make sure it is not underbaked.
8. Remove the pan from the oven and let it cool just a little. Change the oven temperature to 350°F.
9. Transfer the apple filling onto the center of the baking pan with the dough you just baked. Spread it evenly across the pan. Make sure not to overfill the pan. There should be some room for the top layer of the dough, although the dough may extend above the top of the pan.

³ You can collect the peelings, to make some apple compote, with addition of some cranberries.

10. Cover the filling with slices of the dough, slightly thinner than those used for the bottom (3-4 mm). Cover any gaps between them with small thin pieces of dough. You can overlap the small pieces over the larger slices of dough. Do not press the dough down. The heat of the oven will fuse the pieces together.
11. If you have some remaining dough, you can use it to bake some small cookies later. Alternatively, you can grate or crumble the remaining dough and sprinkle it over the top.
12. Place the baking pan back in the oven and bake szarlotka for about 20-30 minutes. At the end of baking, if the top pastry does not start to turn golden, raise the oven temperature to 400°F.
13. The baking is done when the top pastry is golden with some brownish spots.
14. Take szarlotka out of the oven and allow it to cool. You can serve it still warm, but it is also delicious when cold or on the next day. For added delight, serve with whipped cream.

Notes

1. Pastry in the recipe as written, was prepared using Cuisinart 11-cup food processor, but can be prepared manually or in another sufficiently large food processor.