

Foolproof Pie Dough

We wanted a recipe that is tender, flavorful, and—most importantly—consistent.

In search of foolproof pie dough, I set out to sort through all the dubious science, purported secret ingredients, and perennial pie-crust theories to separate fact from fiction and create a recipe that not only bakes up tender and flaky every single time, but also rolls out easily.

In order to roll easily, dough needs more water, but more water makes crusts tough. Therefore, I needed something that's not water but is still wet. As the aromas from a nearby pan of reducing wine reached my nose, the answer hit me like a bottle to the head: alcohol.

Eighty-proof vodka is essentially 40 percent ethanol and 60 percent water. As it happens, gluten cannot form in alcohol, which means that for every tablespoon of vodka I added, only 60 percent of it contributed to gluten development. I made a batch of pie dough with 4 tablespoons each of cold vodka and water. The resulting dough was as smooth as Play-Doh, and I couldn't have made it crack even if I'd wanted to. The baked crust was an unparalleled success. The dough baked up every bit as tender and flaky as any crust I'd ever had, without a hint of booziness to give away its secret. I'd finally come up with a recipe that is 100 percent reliable.

—J. KENJI ALT, *Cook's Illustrated*

redistribute the dough evenly around the processor blade. Add the remaining cup flour and pulse until the mixture is evenly distributed around the bowl and the mass of dough has been broken up, 4 to 6 quick pulses. Empty the mixture into a medium bowl.

2. Sprinkle the vodka and water over the mixture. With a rubber spatula, use a folding motion to mix, pressing down on the dough until the dough is slightly tacky and sticks together. Divide the dough into 2 even balls and flatten each into a 4-inch disk. Wrap each in plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 45 minutes or up to 2 days.

FOOLPROOF PIE DOUGH FOR A SINGLE-CRUST PIE

MAKES ENOUGH FOR ONE 9-INCH PIE

1½ cups (6½ ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour, plus extra for the work surface
½ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar
6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch slices and chilled
¼ cup vegetable shortening, cut into 2 pieces and chilled
2 tablespoons cold vodka
2 tablespoons cold water

1. Pulse ¾ cup of the flour, salt, and sugar together in a food processor until combined, about two 1-second pulses. Add the butter and shortening and process until a homogeneous dough just starts to collect in uneven clumps, about 10 seconds (the dough will resemble cottage cheese curds and there should be no uncoated flour). Scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula and redistribute the dough evenly around the processor blade. Add the remaining ½ cup flour and pulse until the mixture is evenly distributed around the bowl and the mass of dough has been broken up, 4 to 6 quick pulses. Empty the mixture into a medium bowl.

2. Sprinkle the vodka and water over the mixture. With a rubber spatula, use a folding motion to mix, pressing down on the dough until it is slightly tacky and sticks together. Flatten the dough into a 4-inch disk. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 45 minutes or up to 2 days.

3. Adjust an oven rack to the lowest position, place a rimmed baking sheet on the rack, and heat the oven to 425 degrees. Remove the



Our well-hydrated dough is easy to shape into a pie plate.

dough from the refrigerator and roll out on a generously floured (up to ¼ cup) work surface to a 12-inch circle about ⅛ inch thick. Roll the dough loosely around a rolling pin and unroll into a 9-inch pie plate, leaving at least a 1-inch overhang. Ease the dough into the plate by gently lifting the edge of the dough with one hand while pressing into the plate bottom with the other hand. Leave the overhanging dough in place; refrigerate until the dough is firm, about 30 minutes.

4. Trim the overhang to ½ inch beyond the lip of the pie plate. Fold the overhang under itself; the folded edge should be flush with the edge of the pie plate. Flute the edges using your thumb and forefinger or press the tines of a fork against the dough to flatten it against the rim of the pie plate. Refrigerate the dough-lined plate until firm, about 15 minutes.

5. Remove the pie plate from the refrigerator, line the crust with foil, and fill with pie weights or pennies. Place the pie plate on the preheated baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes (for a partially baked crust). Remove the foil and weights, rotate the plate, and bake for 5 to 10 additional minutes (for a fully baked crust).