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## Lemon Chiffon Pie

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 14: Sweet American Classics

### WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

We love the elegant simplicity of lemon chiffon pie but found the gelatin used in most recipes difficult to work with. We use a combination of cornstarch and gelatin to get a creamy pie and add a burst of lemon flavor by tucking a layer of lemon curd beneath the chiffon. Our graham cracker crust adds just a hint of flavor and is a crisp contrast to the soft and fluffy filling.

### Serves 8 to 10

Before cooking the curd mixture, be sure to whisk thoroughly so that no clumps of cornstarch or streaks of egg white remain. Pasteurized egg whites can be substituted for the 3 raw egg whites. Serve with lightly sweetened whipped cream.

### INGREDIENTS

#### CRUST

- 9 whole graham crackers
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

#### FILLING

- 1 teaspoon unflavored gelatin
- 4 tablespoons water
- 5 large eggs (2 whole, 3 separated)
- 1 1/4 cups (8 3/4 ounces) sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest plus 3/4 cup juice (4 lemons)
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 4 ounces cream cheese, cut into 1/2-inch pieces, softened

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. FOR THE CRUST:** Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Process graham crackers in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds (you should have about 1 1/4 cups crumbs). Add sugar and salt and pulse to combine. Add melted butter and pulse until mixture resembles wet sand.
- 2.** Transfer crumbs to 9-inch pie plate. Press crumbs evenly into bottom and up sides of plate. Bake until crust is

lightly browned, 15 to 18 minutes. Allow crust to cool completely.

**3. FOR THE FILLING:** Sprinkle ½ teaspoon gelatin over 2 tablespoons water in small bowl and let sit until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Repeat with second small bowl, remaining ½ teaspoon gelatin, and remaining 2 tablespoons water.

**4.** Whisk 2 eggs and 3 yolks together in medium saucepan until thoroughly combined. Whisk in 1 cup sugar, cornstarch, and salt until well combined. Whisk in lemon zest and juice and heavy cream. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly, until thickened and slightly translucent, 4 to 5 minutes (mixture should register 170 degrees). Stir in 1 water-gelatin mixture until dissolved. Remove pan from heat and let stand for 2 minutes.

**5.** Remove 1¼ cups curd from pan and pour through fine-mesh strainer set in bowl. Transfer strained curd to prepared pie shell (do not wash out strainer or bowl). Place filled pie shell in freezer. Add remaining water-gelatin mixture and cream cheese to remaining curd in pan and whisk to combine. (If cream cheese does not melt, briefly return pan to low heat.) Pour through strainer into now-empty bowl.

**6.** Using stand mixer, whip 3 egg whites on medium-low speed until foamy, about 2 minutes. Increase speed to medium-high and slowly add remaining ¼ cup sugar. Continue whipping until whites are stiff and glossy, about 4 minutes. Add curd-cream cheese mixture and whip on medium speed until few streaks remain, about 30 seconds. Remove bowl from mixer and, using spatula, scrape sides of bowl and stir mixture until no streaks remain. Remove pie shell from freezer and carefully pour chiffon over curd, allowing chiffon to mound slightly in center. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours or up to 2 days before serving.

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## TECHNIQUE

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#### FOR FLAWLESS CHIFFON, TWO THICKENERS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Most chiffon pies call for adding only one thickener—usually gelatin or cornstarch—to the curd before combining it with the whipped egg whites. We made dozens of pies with both thickeners and produced dozens of failures (some stiff, some soupy) before we realized that the solution was to use a little of both.

#### JUST GELATIN: RUBBERY

Gelatin, a pure protein, works by forming a gel network that traps the liquid in the filling. But too much can lead to a bouncy texture—and even the ideal amount produces inconsistent results. If the gelatin-thickened curd is allowed to firm up a tad too long before being combined with the egg whites, it leaves streaks.



#### JUST CORNSTARCH: SOUPY

Cornstarch thickens when its starch molecules bond together and trap water, creating a solid, jellylike structure. It's more forgiving to work with than gelatin, but unless you add a glut of it, the filling will be loose. And too much cornstarch will mute the flavor of the filling.



#### GELATIN + CORNSTARCH: PERFECT

Using both gelatin and cornstarch in moderation produces



chiffon that sets up reliably but isn't rubbery. The proteins in just 1 teaspoon of gelatin are enough to form a gel network, while a mere tablespoon of cornstarch acts as a filler that makes the network more stable without dulling the filling's lemony punch.

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