



**P**UMPKIN CHIFFON PIE—A lighter, more elegant, and (as we found out) incredibly delicious version of the old Thanksgiving standard—consists of a gelatin-stabilized pumpkin custard lightened by meringue and sometimes whipped cream. The result is a fluffy, mousse-like, flavor-packed pie that, in my opinion, makes an elegant finale to a heavy Thanksgiving feast. The healthy glug of rum makes it an even happier holiday closer.

I know. I just used a big list of red-flag chef words: “chiffon,” “gelatin-stabilized,” “custard,” “meringue.” But my real operative word for this pie was “ease.” I set out to dial this dessert back from scary to simple and create an accessible but still showstopping pie that my relatives would ask for year after year.

After studying various existing recipes (see “Fashions in Food”), I learned that the first step in most pumpkin chiffon pie recipes is to separate the eggs. You gently cook the yolks with sugar and pumpkin puree to make a custard base, taking care not to scramble the eggs. Then you mix in melted gelatin for extra stability. After chilling the warm mixture, you can finally fold in whipped egg whites and whipped cream. I tried this routine a few times in the test kitchen and found my head spinning as I tried to juggle the pies’ various heating, cooling, whipping, and folding needs.

I began to question whether cooking a custard base was really necessary. Pumpkin puree has plenty of body and flavor, so maybe I didn’t need to go to the trouble. I simply microwaved the pumpkin puree before combining it with cream, brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt and stirring in warmed gelatin and rum—without the egg yolks, there was no need to heat the mixture further. True, the pumpkin mixture was slightly fibrous, but pureeing the filling in the food processor took care of that, leaving it silky-smooth.

Next up, an airy meringue to fold into it.

There’s a limit to how much air egg whites can hold. Once that line is crossed, the resulting meringue will become dry and deflate. But for this recipe, I wanted my egg whites to hold as much air as possible. To make this goal easier to achieve, I added sugar, which dissolves in the egg white, forming a more stable film surrounding the air bubbles, halfway through whipping.



Eliminating the egg yolks from the filling streamlined the process.

Once my mixture tripled in volume, transformed from transparent to opaque white, and held its shape, I carefully folded it into my pumpkin base. I transferred this mixture to a prebaked graham cracker crust and placed the pie in the refrigerator, where it would chill and set—the whole thing was done without any time on the stovetop.

A few hours later, the filling had shed its jiggle and was cleanly sliceable. A

layer of whipped cream spread over the domed pie intensified its dramatic look, and a handful of crumbled gingersnap cookies sprinkled over the top gave it some playful decoration and a bit of contrasting crunch.

Removing the custard-making step made this a pretty simple dessert, one that delivered outsize flavors and left my tasters humming happy songs for the rest of the day.

## **One Pie, Two Cookies**

We love the flavor combination of gingersnap cookies and pumpkin, but we found that a crust made with crushed gingersnaps overpowered the delicate filling. Instead, we make a traditional graham cracker crust and garnish the pie with crumbled gingersnaps.

# RUM PUMPKIN CHIFFON PIE

Serves 8 to 10

If you prefer to use pasteurized egg whites in the filling, use  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup and increase the whipping time in step 4 to 5 to 6 minutes. For a well-mounded pie, be sure to fully whip the egg whites to glossy, stiff peaks in step 4. Plan ahead: This pie needs to be chilled for at least 4 hours before serving.

## CRUST

- 9 whole graham crackers, broken into 1-inch pieces
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground ginger
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

## FILLING

- 1 tablespoon unflavored gelatin
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dark rum
- 1 (15-ounce) can unsweetened pumpkin puree
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup packed (2 $\frac{1}{3}$  ounces) dark brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup heavy cream
- 4 large egg whites
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup (2 $\frac{1}{3}$  ounces) granulated sugar

## TOPPING

- 1 cup heavy cream, chilled
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 gingersnap cookies, crushed into  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch pieces

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**1. FOR THE CRUST:** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Process graham cracker pieces, sugar, and ginger in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Add melted butter and pulse until combined, about 8 pulses. Transfer crumbs to 9-inch pie plate. Using bottom of dry measuring cup, press crumbs into bottom and up sides of plate. Bake until crust is fragrant

**3.** Meanwhile, microwave pumpkin until heated to 110 degrees, 30 to 60 seconds. Process pumpkin, brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt in food processor until completely smooth, about 1 minute. Scrape down sides of bowl and process until no streaks remain, 10 to 15 seconds. Transfer pumpkin mixture to bowl with gelatin mixture and stir to combine. Stir in cream.

**4.** Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip egg whites on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip whites to soft, billowy mounds, about 1 minute. Gradually add granulated sugar and whip until glossy, stiff peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Whisk one-third of meringue into pumpkin mixture until smooth. Using rubber spatula, fold remaining meringue into pumpkin mixture until only few white streaks remain.

**5.** Spoon filling into center of cooled crust. Gently spread filling to edges of crust, leaving mounded dome in center. Refrigerate pie for at least 4 hours or up to 24 hours.

**6. FOR THE TOPPING:** Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip cream, sugar, and vanilla on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form, 1 to 3 minutes. Spread whipped cream evenly over pie, following domed contours. Sprinkle gingersnap pieces over top. Serve.

and beginning to brown, 14 to 16 minutes. Let crust cool completely on wire rack, about 30 minutes.

**2. FOR THE FILLING:** Sprinkle gelatin over rum in large bowl and let sit until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Microwave until mixture is bubbling around edges and gelatin dissolves, about 30 seconds. Let cool until slightly warm, about 110 degrees. (It will be syrupy.)