

Lemon Meringue Pie

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Based on a Cook's Illustrated recipe of the same name.

Yield: 8 servings.

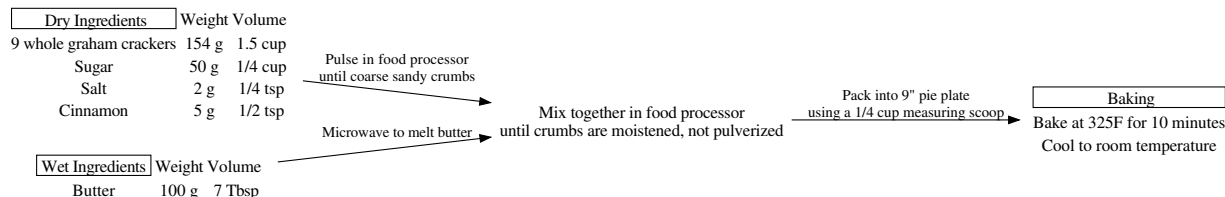
Technical skills: making a custard and stabilizing egg whites

Try making a good lemon tart before attempting this recipe. This recipe requires careful water management. Too much water (or too little corn starch or flour) will cause the custard to become a soup and fail to set because the meringue will act as an insulator in the oven because the excess water will not be able to escape, no matter how long you bake this pie. Trapped air is an excellent insulator, and the protein matrix in the egg whites will trap any steam, forcing the water to exit via the crust (and causing a "soggy bottom"). Too little water will result in a poor final texture, more akin to jello than custard. The right balance is that the custard can support the meringue after both have cooled to room temperature.

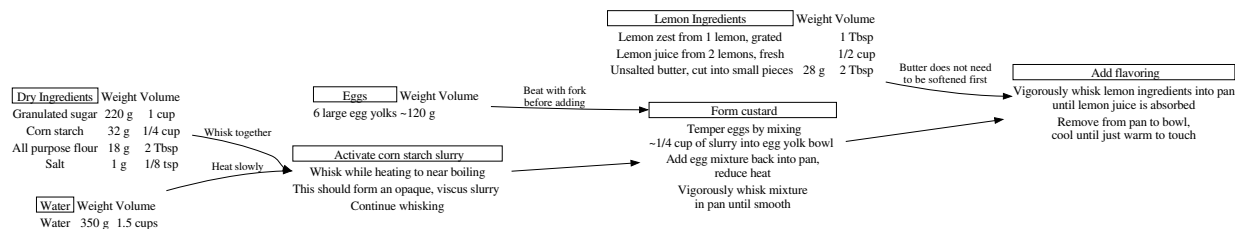
Whipped egg whites also require a balance in this recipe. If you whip beyond stiff peaks, the protein matrix is likely to collapse after baking. Soft peaks is the ideal stage for this pie, although that means a stabilizer (cream of tartar) will be needed to maintain the shape of the meringue when cutting it. Be very careful to not contaminate the egg whites with any yolks (or any other type of oil), as this will hinder the incorporation of air into the whites when whipping them. When baking, it's important to ensure the meringue has a light golden brown color, as this indicates the protein matrix has had the water driven out of it (and therefore it will be stable at room temperature long enough to eat it).

Graham Cracker Crust

This crust is sized for a 9" pie dish using one package of Nabisco graham crackers. Don't cut the crackers too finely in the food processor, as coarse crumbs will be less likely to fall apart when cutting the pie later.

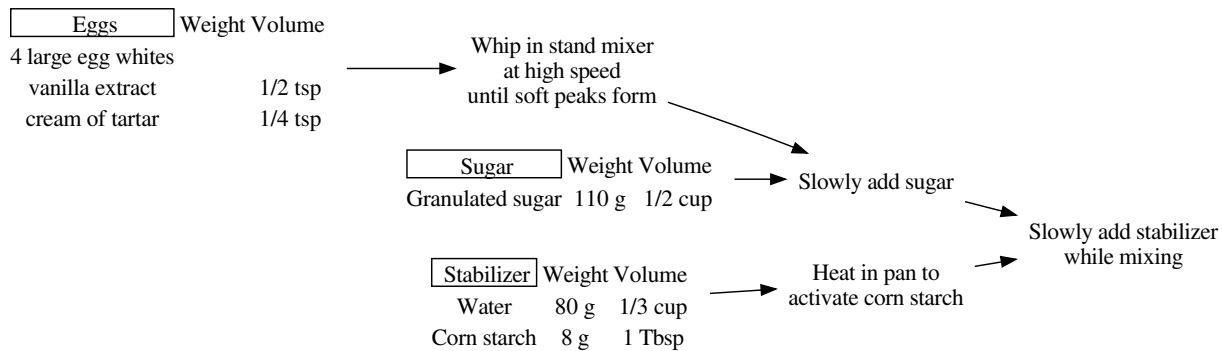


Custard filling



Meringue

Make sure there are no egg yolks in the egg whites!



Assembling and baking

Put custard filling into cooled graham cracker crust, top with meringue, sealing edges of pie with meringue. Bake at 325F until meringue is golden brown, approximately 20 minutes.

Cool completely to room temperature before serving.