

ITALIAN ALMOND TART



ALMOND PASTE

Almond paste is a mixture of finely ground blanched almonds, sugar, and water that has been cooked until smooth. During the grinding process, the almonds release oils that enhance the aroma and flavor of the paste. Used in the making of many confections and baked goods, almond paste can be found in cans or plastic tubes in most well-stocked food stores. The canned variety tends to be moister, which makes working with it easier.

Fold the dough round in half and carefully transfer to a 9½-inch (24-cm) tart pan, preferably with a removable bottom. Unfold and ease the round into the pan, without stretching it, and pat it firmly into the bottom and up the sides of the pan. Trim off any excess dough by gently running a rolling pin across the top of the pan. Press the dough into the sides to extend it slightly above the rim to offset any shrinkage during baking.

Refrigerate or freeze the tart shell until firm, about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, place an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and preheat to 375°F (190°C).

Partially bake the tart shell as directed on page 109. Transfer to a wire rack. Place an oven rack in the middle of the oven, and reduce the oven temperature to 350°F (180°C).

In a bowl, using an electric mixer on medium speed or a whisk, beat the butter until smooth. Add the almond paste, one piece at a time, beating until smooth after each addition. While continuing to beat, sprinkle in the sugar. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Stir in the flour.

Spread the jam evenly in the bottom of the partially baked tart shell. Spoon in the almond paste mixture and spread evenly over the jam. Sprinkle the surface evenly with the sliced almonds.

Bake the tart until the filling is golden and the middle is firm to the touch, 35–45 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and let the tart cool completely. If using a tart pan with a removable bottom, let the sides fall away (page 105), then slide the tart onto a serving plate. Serve at room temperature.

MAKES ONE 9½-INCH (24-CM) TART. OR 8 SERVINGS

1 rolled-out Basic Tart Dough round (page 111)

½ cup (4 oz/125 g) unsalted butter, at room temperature

½ lb (250 g) almond paste, cut into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes

¼ cup (2 oz/60 g) sugar

2 large eggs

⅓ cup (2 oz/60 g) unbleached all-purpose (plain) flour

⅓ cup (3½ oz/105 g) raspberry, plum, or cherry jam

⅓ cup (1½ oz/45 g) sliced (flaked) almonds

BASIC TART DOUGH

1 large egg yolk

2 tablespoons very cold water

1 teaspoon vanilla extract (essence)

1¼ cups (6½ oz/200 g) unbleached all-purpose (plain) flour

⅓ cup (3 oz/90 g) sugar

¼ teaspoon salt

½ cup (4 oz/125 g) cold unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch (6-mm) cubes

In a small bowl, stir together the egg yolk, water, and vanilla. Set aside.

To make the dough by hand, in a large bowl, stir together the flour, sugar, and salt. Using a pastry cutter or two knives, cut the butter into the flour mixture until the texture resembles coarse cornmeal, with butter pieces no larger than small peas. Add the egg mixture and mix with a fork just until the dough pulls together.

To make the dough in a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, stir together the flour, sugar, and salt in the mixer bowl. Add the butter and mix on medium-low speed until the texture resembles coarse cornmeal, with butter pieces no larger than small peas. Add the egg mixture and mix just until the dough pulls together.

Transfer the dough to a work surface, pat into a ball, and flatten into a disk. The dough may be used immediately or wrapped in plastic wrap and refrigerated until well chilled, about 30 minutes.

To roll out the dough, on a lightly floured board, flatten the disk with 6–8 gentle taps

of the rolling pin. Lift the dough and give it a quarter turn. Lightly dust the top of the dough or the rolling pin with flour as needed, then roll out as described on page 106 until the dough is about ⅛ inch (3 mm) thick.

Use a small, sharp knife to cut out a round or rounds 2 inches greater in diameter than your tart or larger tartlet pans. Use a small, sharp knife or a cookie cutter to cut out rounds ½–1 inch (12 mm–2.5 cm) greater in diameter than your miniature tartlet pans. If using a rectangular tart pan, cut out a rectangle 2 inches (5 cm) larger on all sides than the pan. Makes enough dough for one 9½-inch (24-cm) tart, six 4-inch (10-cm) tartlets, twelve 2-inch (5-cm) miniature tartlets, or one 13¼-by-4¼-inch (35-by-11-cm) rectangular tart.

Nut Dough Variation: Add 2 tablespoons ground toasted pecans, walnuts, almonds, or hazelnuts (filberts) to the flour mixture and proceed as directed.

Make-Ahead Tip: Tart dough may be made ahead and frozen for up to 1 month. To freeze, place the dough round on a 12-inch (30-cm) cardboard circle and wrap it well with plastic wrap. Alternatively, use the round to line a tart pan and wrap well.

SWEETENED WHIPPED CREAM

1 cup (8 fl oz/250 ml) heavy (double) cream

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract (essence)

In a deep bowl, combine the cream, sugar, and vanilla. Using an electric mixer set on medium-high speed, beat until soft, billowy peaks form, about 2 minutes. Cover the bowl and refrigerate until serving or for up to 2 hours. Makes about 2 cups (16 fl oz/ 500 ml).

To pipe the whipped cream onto the surface of a pie or tart, continue to beat the cream until firm peaks form, about 1 minute longer. Fit a 12-inch (30-cm) pastry bag with a ¼-inch (6-mm) plain or star tip. Just above the tip, give the bag a few twists and push it into the tip to close off the opening. Fold the top of the bag over to form a 3-inch (7.5-cm) cuff. Slide one hand under the cuff to support the bag, then scoop the whipped cream into the bag, filling it half full. Unfold the cuff and twist the top until the bag is taut and the tip is full. Hold the tip at a 45-degree angle close to the pie or tart and squeeze to make rosettes or other patterns.