



JOHN MEISSNER'S "CELTIC CANUCK" BUTTER TARTS



This version is a tribute to Mary MacLeod's Celtic heritage and is based on her original recipe from 1900, but adds a twist of maple flavour and a subtle punch of warm caramel Irish whiskey flavour in every raisin. Bursting with Canadian ingredients, this combination of classic, raisin and pecans evokes feelings of a cozy Maritime hearth. I was going to call it the "Mary Mac", but I didn't want to get sued by Great Big Sea. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

The Crust

2 cups (approx. 250g) sifted all-purpose flour
2 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
2.5 oz (70g) cold lard or shortening
3.5 oz (100g) cold butter, cut in small cubes
½ cup (125ml) ice-cold water
1/3 cup finely crushed toasted pecans

The Filling

¾ cup dark brown sugar
½ cup Amber or Dark Maple syrup
2 eggs beaten
½ cup salted butter (melted)
1 teaspoon of white vinegar
1 teaspoon of apple cider vinegar
1 teaspoon of vanilla
A pinch of salt

The Raisins

1 cup of Sun-Maid Raisins (*Thompson Seedless*)
1/2 cup of Glendalough Double Barrel Irish Whiskey

The Garnish

Vancouver Island Flakey Sea Salt

* **Note:** For a more pronounced butter flavour, use COWS Premium 84% M.F. unsalted butter.

INSTRUCTIONS

Macerate the Raisins at least an hour before baking, but preferably 2-3 days in advance. Heat the Irish Whiskey in a sauce pot until it is hot, but not boiling. Use enough to completely submerge the raisins. Place raisins in a jam or preserve jar that has a tight fitting lid. Pour the hot liquid over the raisins, cover and let them steep for an hour or up to 2-3 days before use.



The amount of liquid will decrease over time as the raisins soak up the whiskey, so once or twice a day give the jar a light shake so that all the raisins have time in the steeping liquid.

1) Make the Tart Shells

- Sift flour, baking powder and salt together, and add the crushed pecans.
- Using a pastry cutter, cut in the cold lard or shortening, until it looks like coarse crumbs.
- Then, add the butter pieces and cut them in only until they are the size of small peas. Leaving the butter in larger chunks is what creates the buttery pockets and 'flake' as the pastry bakes.
- Add the ice cold water gradually. The recipe calls for ½ cup of water, but you should add it one tablespoon at a time. You may not need the full amount, so stop as soon as the dough clings together in a ball. Try not to overwork the dough or you'll melt the butter.
- Chill the dough in the fridge for 30-60 minutes before rolling. This also prevents the butter from melting prematurely, which would make the crust greasy instead of flaky.
- Roll the pastry slightly thicker than 1/8 of an inch thick. Again, try not to overwork the dough as it will create gluten and make the dough stretchy instead of flakey. Roll from the centre outwards, dusting the rolling pin and your work surface as needed to prevent the dough from sticking.
- Cut the dough into circles, using a cookie cutter or large cup. For standard sized baking tins, approximately 4 inches in diameter works well. Drop the circles into the tins and pat them gently into place. Avoid pressing or squishing them down.
- Once the tray is full, use the tip of a fork to pierce the bottom of each shell. This allows steam to escape while baking, preventing the bottom crust from bubbling up and pushing the filling out.
- Freeze the tart shells for at least an hour or even overnight. While the prepared shells are chilling, start making your filling.



2) Make the Filling

- In a medium pot or sauce pan, melt the butter and dissolve the sugar stirring over a medium low heat.
- Once the sugar crystals have fully dissolved, stir in vanilla, both teaspoons of vinegar and salt. The vinegars cut the sweetness and also help stop the sugar from recrystallizing. The apple cider vinegar also adds a nice flavour.
- Add the maple syrup last and continue stirring until everything is well incorporated. For a greater whiskey flavour, add a tablespoon of the steeping liquid to the filling.

- Remove from heat and set aside.
- In a medium bowl, lightly whisk the two eggs until well blended. Do not over-mix or use an electric mixer, because it'll add too much air to the filling.
- Gradually drizzle the sugar mixture into the eggs as you continue to whisk. Take your time with this. If you mix it all at once or add the hot sugar too quickly, you'll cook the eggs. Keep gradually adding the sugar to the eggs until everything is thoroughly mixed together.
- Cover with plastic wrap and chill in the fridge for at least an hour or until you're ready to start baking. The mixture will keep in the fridge for days, it just needs a quick stir when you're ready to use it.
- After chilling the filling mixture in the fridge, you'll notice that it has thickened, becoming more viscous. This is a good thing, because it removes trapped air bubbles and also gives the filling time to rest before it hits the hot oven.



3) Baking your Butter Tarts

- Set your oven rack to the lower-middle position and preheat to 425°F (218°C) using a 'Conventional' or 'Surround' bake setting. Traditional butter tarts bake best with steady, direct heat similar to the wood-fired ovens used by early pioneers before fan-driven convection ovens existed.
- Remove your tart shells from the freezer. Add roughly 6-8 raisins to each of your frozen tart shells, before adding the filling. Don't overcrowd the shells with raisins or the filling will just bubble over.
- Add filling mixture to each shell, filling them approximately 3/4 full.
- Bake at 425°F for the first 5 minutes to sear the pastry, then reduce your heat to 375°F (190°C) for an additional 15-20 minutes allowing them to cook gently without burning.
- Remove from oven and allow to cool completely before removing the tarts from the baking tin.
- Garnish each tart with a pinch of the flakey sea salt.



Final Note: If you prefer your butter tarts on the runny side, remove them from the oven closer to the 15 minute mark. If you prefer them to be firmer, remove them closer to the 20 minute mark. Every brand of oven is different when it comes to maintaining temperature consistency, so cook times may vary. You'll know the butter tarts are done when the filling is dark brown and bubbling.