

CANADA'S ORIGINAL BUTTER TART RECIPE

Inspired by the original pioneer recipe, first documented by Mrs. Malcolm "Mary" MacLeod, in the The Women's Auxiliary of the Royal Victoria Hospital Cookbook (Barrie, Ontario) in the year 1900.

(Source: [Simcoe County Archives](#))

Mary's recipe used only four main ingredients; butter, eggs, flour and sugar. Using these home grown Canadian ingredients, instead of chemically manufactured fillers like corn syrup, provides a well balanced, buttery tart that is not overly sweet.

Mary's recipe was the gold standard for over a century, and the simplicity of this particular recipe is a tribute to all those early pioneer women who helped build this great country.

INGREDIENTS

The Crust - documented by Mrs. C. J. McRae, (Stayner, Ontario)

- 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

The Filling - documented by Mrs. Malcolm "Mary" MacLeod, (Barrie, Ontario)

- 1 cup dark brown or Demerara sugar **
- 2 eggs beaten
- 1/2 cup butter (melted) *
- 1 teaspoon of white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon of apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla
- A pinch of salt

The Raisins (currants)

- 1 cup of Sun-Maid Raisins (*Thompson Seedless*)

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

** **Note:** For a maple flavoured tart, remove 1/4 cup sugar and add 1/2 cup maple syrup.

INSTRUCTIONS

1) Make the Tart Shells

- Sift flour, baking powder and salt together.
- 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



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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. Continue stirring until everything is well incorporated.
- 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.



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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. Omit this step if you don't like raisins, prefer plain "classic" tarts.
- 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 cool before removing the tarts from the baking tin.



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.

