

Pecan Pie with Maple Cream



As an Aussie, I've never been convinced by putting pumpkin, a vegetable I associate with Sunday roasts, into a sweet pie ... but I do love this other American classic pie. Pecans are grown widely throughout the southern USA, where pecan pie is as popular as pumpkin pie on some Thanksgiving tables as well as being a feature of many Christmas feasts. Use your favourite sweetened or unsweetened shortcrust pastry recipe or, as I did, Carême ready rolled pastry, a fabulous product that's always in my freezer. I tried a few different dessert wines with this pie, but couldn't go past a PX Sherry, Cardenal Cisneros from Sanchez Romate, which worked a treat with the maple syrup. I like the touch of acid that the crème fraîche adds to the Maple Cream (thanks Pepe!) but use freshly whipped cream if you prefer a milder taste.

Serves 8

INGREDIENTS

- 320g shortcrust pastry
- 300g shelled pecans
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 100g butter, melted
- ½ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- ⅓ cup plain flour

Maple Cream

- 200ml crème fraîche
- ¼ cup maple syrup

Baking the pastry before adding the filling guarantees a crisp crust; use any dried legumes, rice, lentils or coffee beans to weight it down (this is called blind baking). If you bake a lot of tarts and pies, it's worth buying reusable pastry weights from a kitchenware store.

METHOD

1. Make Maple Cream: whisk crème fraîche and maple syrup together until smooth, cover and refrigerate for at least a couple of hours, until thickened.
2. Roll pastry to fit base and sides of a 25cm flan tin.
3. Press gently into the tin, trim 1cm above the top of the tin, fold the excess over and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 200°C.
5. Place the tin on an oven tray, prick the base of the pastry with a fork, cover with baking paper, top with dried beans (or pastry weights) and bake for 10 minutes. Discard paper and beans and bake for a further 5 minutes or so until lightly coloured.
6. Meanwhile, roughly chop all but 16 of the pecans.
7. Combine chopped pecans, egg, butter, maple syrup and sugar. Sift in flour and stir until smooth.
8. Remove tin from oven and reduce oven temperature to 180°C. Pour pecan mixture over pastry, arrange whole pecans on top and return to the oven for 25-30 minutes, until firm. Cool in the tin, then carefully lift out and slide off the base onto a platter.
9. Serve warm or at room temperature with Maple Cream on the side.