

# COOK

*with*  
confidence

A classic tarte tatin is a lot easier to make than it looks, says Alex Mackay, and there are many ways to vary it, too

Photographs Peter Cassidy



Tender apples soaked full of buttery caramel are what make a traditional tarte tatin so delicious. The butter and sugar are turned into a butterscotch caramel for the apples into which they soften and sweetly release their juice. They simmer together irresistibly and become part of a divine whole. The pastry is tucked into the top and the apple caramel bubbles up to glaze the golden edges of the pastry.

Tarte tatin is one of the first desserts I wanted to learn how to cook and, for all the mystique that surrounds this French classic, it is probably the easiest of all apple tarts. I have tried every technique and am happy to report that the easiest way is also the best way.

When I ran my cookery school in France I would make the traditional apple tarte tatin, then each student would make a variation. From plum to pineapple, each had something to say for itself. But of all the other fruits, banana is my favourite, and with a little passionfruit spooned in, even more so.

Making a sweet tarte tatin is about two key steps of confidence – making the caramel and turning out the tart, and I've tried to make both easy for you. Once this beauty is baked and you devour it with lashings of crème fraîche or ice cream, it is impossible to imagine any other tart could taste as sweet. ▸





1 Cook the caster sugar and butter, stirring occasionally, until the caramel is the colour of dark butterscotch. 2 Place the half apple in the middle of the pan, rounded-side down, then tightly arrange the quarters around it. 3 Cover with the pastry circle, tucking the edges into the side of the pan

## Tarte tatin

Serves 8

I use Granny Smith apples for this as they have enough acidity to balance the sweetness of the sugar and also hold their shape when cooked. The crème fraîche pastry gives almost the same texture as traditional puff pastry. If you want to make life easier, use a 375g pack of fresh ready-rolled puff pastry.

**Prep time** 20 minutes, plus chilling

**Cook time** 40 minutes, plus resting

**Do ahead** The tarte tatin can be made a day ahead; baked, cooled then either left whole or cut into portions and then reheated at 180°C, fan 170°C, gas 4 for 15 minutes

### For the crème fraîche pastry

125g (4½oz) soft butter

100g (3½oz) crème fraîche

225g (8oz) plain flour, plus extra for dusting

1 tablespoon icing sugar

### For the caramel and apples

175g (6oz) caster sugar

50g (2oz) butter

6-7 small Granny Smith apples

### You will also need

a 20cm (8in) ovenproof frying pan

In the bowl of a food processor, whiz the 125g (4½oz) of butter with the crème fraîche until smooth. Add the flour and whiz together, using the pulse button, until a dough starts to come together. Remove the dough from the food processor and knead, on a lightly floured surface, until smooth. (If you don't have a food processor, the pastry is easy to make in a large bowl with a wooden spoon.) Flatten the dough into a 15cm (6in) circle and place in the fridge for 45 minutes to chill.

Preheat your oven to 200°C, fan 180°C, gas 6.

Before you start the caramel, quarter fill your sink with cold water, just deep enough to sit the bottom of your frying

pan in. Put the caster sugar into the frying pan and add the butter. Cook this over a medium to high heat, stirring occasionally, until the caramel is a golden amber colour (4-5 minutes). Don't worry if it looks like it has separated, as it'll be fine when you add the apples. As soon as the caramel is ready, plunge the base of the pan into the cold water in the sink to stop it from cooking.

Roll out the chilled pastry to a 24cm (9½in) circle and dust with the icing sugar. Peel the apples and cut them in half. Carefully remove the core from 1 half apple and place the half apple, rounded-side down, in the middle of the pan. Cut the remainder of the apples into quarters, remove their cores and arrange around the outside. Press the apples in tightly as they will shrink during cooking.

Put the pan back over a medium to high heat and cook gently for 5-6 minutes until the apples begin to soak up the caramel. Remove from the heat and cover with the pastry circle, tucking the edges into the sides of the pan. Cut a little hole in the centre of the pastry to allow any excess steam to escape.

Bake for 25-30 minutes in the oven until the pastry is golden. Put a baking tray on the shelf below to catch any drips. Remove from the oven and leave to sit for at least 10 minutes.

To serve the tart, invert it on to a board or large flat plate (see page 103). Serve with chilled crème fraîche, cream or vanilla ice cream.

**Per serving** 430cal; 23.4g fat, of which 14.8g saturated fat; 55.3g carbohydrate; 3.2g protein; 26.2g added sugar; 0.3g salt; 1.9g fibre ▶

### Tips for tarts

- Always get extra fruit when you make a fruit tart of any sort – it is impossible to tell exactly how much fruit you will need to use, so you are better off with a leftover apple that you can eat, rather than a gaping hole in your tart. This sounds basic but is a real stress saver.

- When placing the fruit into the caramel, really pack it in, as it will invariably shrink and leave gaps as the tart cooks.
- To get an even thickness when rolling this or any pastry, roll from the centre of the pastry outward and rotate a quarter turn between each roll.
- Cut the pastry at

- least 4cm (1½in) larger than the base of the pan, so that it can be tucked around the outside of the fruit. This also allows for a little shrinkage.
- Tuck the pastry around the sides of the fruit so the steam can escape and the edges of the pastry can absorb the caramel.



Tarte tatin



### Turning out the tart

To invert the tart, put the pan over a high heat for 30 seconds. Turn off the heat and place your hand over the top of the pastry with your fingers spread. You should be able to turn the tart a full circle in the pan. If you can, the tart will come out easily; if it feels like the fruit is sticking, put the pan back over the heat.

Away from the heat, cover the top of the pan with a chopping board or a large flat plate. Hold the pan handle with your dominant hand and spread your fingers over the board, pressing down well for support. Flip the tart, put the board on to your surface, then lift off the pan.

### Caramel know-how

- The lighter the caramel, the sweeter it will be. A golden amber colour is ideal. As soon as the sugar and butter begin to brown, stand over the caramel as it will burn very quickly.

- Have some cold water at the ready in the sink to put the base of the pan into to stop the caramel cooking once it is ready. This also prevents you from burning your hands when putting the fruit into the pan.

- When making caramel with sugar and butter, it often looks as if the sugar is about to set in lumps just before it caramelises and then looks as if it has separated soon after. Don't worry, the juices from the fruit will emulsify it.

- Leaving the cooked tart to rest in the pan allows the fruit to soak up the caramel.



Banana and passionfruit tarte tatin



### Banana and passionfruit tarte tatin

Serves 8

Bananas and passionfruit are a favourite combination for this time of year, just the thing to make you feel that the winter is not so bad after all. If you prefer, use a 375g pack of fresh ready-rolled puff pastry.

**Prep time** 20 minutes, plus chilling

**Cook time** 35 minutes, plus resting

**Do ahead** The tarte tatin can be made a day ahead; baked, cooled then either left whole or cut into portions and then reheated at 180°C, fan 170°C, gas 4 for 15 minutes.

The passionfruit crème fraîche can be mixed and kept in the fridge for a couple of days

1 x quantity crème fraîche pastry, see page 100

1 tablespoon icing sugar

**For the caramel**

175g (6oz) caster sugar

75g (3oz) butter

4 passionfruit

5-7 large bananas

315g (11oz) crème fraîche

2 tablespoons icing sugar

Preheat the oven to 200°C, fan 180°C, gas 6. Once chilled, roll out the pastry to a 24cm (9½in) circle and dust with the icing sugar.

Before you start the caramel, quarter fill your sink with water, just deep enough to sit the bottom of your frying pan in. Put the caster sugar into your frying pan and add the butter. Cook this over a medium to high heat, stirring occasionally, until the caramel is a golden amber colour (4-5 minutes). Do not worry if the caramel looks like it has separated. It'll all be fine when you add the bananas. As soon as the caramel is ready, plunge the base of the pan into the cold water. This stops the caramel from cooking. Halve 2 of the passionfruit and spoon the pulp over the cooled caramel.

Peel the bananas and slice them into 3cm (1¼in) slices on a long angle. Working from the outside in, place the bananas on top of the caramel. Push ▷



Shallot and chestnut tartes tatin

the bottom angle of each slice of banana underneath the top angle of the previous slice so they fit snugly.

Cover with the pastry circle, tucking the edges into the side of the pan. Cut a little hole in the centre of the pastry to allow the excess steam to escape.

Bake for 25-30 minutes until the pastry is golden. Mix the pulp of the remaining passionfruit with the crème fraîche and the 2 tablespoons of icing sugar and chill.

Remove the tart from the oven and leave to sit for at least 10 minutes. To serve, invert it on to a board or large flat plate (see page 103). Serve with the chilled passionfruit crème fraîche.

**Per serving** 689cals; 42g fat, of which 27.2g saturated fat; 77.4g carbohydrate; 5.2g protein; 32.7g added sugar; 0.4g salt; 2.1g fibre

### Shallot and chestnut tartes tatin

Serves 4

The combination of flaky pastry, sweet shallots and chestnuts is wonderful and, to make it even better, this is served

with a horseradish crème fraîche. If you prefer, you can make this as one large tart by adding the chestnuts and garlic to the shallots once they are cooked and pressing the pastry over the top. Use a 375g pack of fresh ready-rolled puff pastry if time is short.

**Prep time** 20 minutes, plus chilling

**Cook time** 50 minutes

**Do ahead** The tartes tatin can be assembled a day ahead; bring to room temperature before baking – they are best baked on the day. The horseradish crème fraîche can be mixed and chilled for a couple of days

**1 x quantity crème fraîche pastry, see page 100, with ½ teaspoon salt added**

**2 x 300g packs shallots**

**1 x 300g tub chicken or same quantity vegetable stock**

**225ml (8fl oz) red wine**

**4 large cloves garlic, peeled**

**75g (3oz) butter**

**1 x 200g pack whole cooked vacuum-packed chestnuts, separated**

**1 x 25g pack fresh rosemary, leaves only, chopped**  
**1 x 200g tub crème fraîche**  
**1 heaped tablespoon horseradish sauce (not creamed)**

Roll out the pastry to a 35cm (14in) square, chill for 15 minutes then cut out 4 x 15cm (6in) circles – I use a plate or pan lid to cut around.

Next, peel the shallots, and halve any that are large – you want 28 in total. Place them into a medium-size, shallow saucepan.

Cover with the chicken or vegetable stock and red wine, add the garlic and 60g (2½oz) of the butter.

Cover with a lid, bring to the boil, remove the lid then simmer rapidly for about 20 minutes until the shallots are soft. Preheat the oven to 200°C, fan 180°C, gas 6.

On each of 2 lined baking sheets, make 2 little stars, each with 7 shallots, and place a clove of cooked garlic in the centre of each. (Keep the red wine glaze from the pan to one side.) Place a chestnut between each of the shallots. Sprinkle ¼ of the rosemary over the top and dot each tart with a quarter of the remaining butter.

Place a circle of pastry on top of each, cupping the edges downward with your palms, and bake for 25-30 minutes in the preheated oven – place one sheet on the centre shelf and the other on the shelf below and swap them halfway through the cooking time.

To make the horseradish cream, mix together the crème fraîche and horseradish sauce with the remaining chopped rosemary and season.

Once the tarts are cooked, carefully flip them over with a fish slice and slide them on to serving plates.

Heat the red wine glaze and use it to brush the tops of the tarts. Pour any excess glaze separately into a small jug to serve with the tatin along with the horseradish crème fraîche.

**Per serving** 1,043cals; 74.3g fat, of which 46.8g saturated fat; 78.2g carbohydrate; 11g protein; 6.5g added sugar; 1.5g salt; 6.2g fibre □