

Perfect
Dessert

AT HOME IN PROVENCE

APRICOT=HONEY=ALMOND TART

For the past ten years, this has been my most successful dessert, hands down. I love to make it and I love to eat it. It is so dazzling to look at that your guests will be incredulous, exclaiming “*You* made that?” when you bring it to the table. And the recipe, from start to finish, is child’s play. The pastry is simply patted into the pan. It’s so foolproof that during the sizzling summer months I often get up very early and bake the tart first thing, before the idea of lighting an oven strikes me as a criminal act.

The purely Provençal combination of apricots, almonds, and honey seems to have been made in heaven, for when apricots are at their peak, the fruit truly tastes as though it has been infused with the flavors of honey and of almonds. When apricots are out of season, I use fresh purple figs, plums, or a combination of fruits such as peaches, apricots, and nectarines. Whenever pitted fruits are used, be sure to cut them in half and bake them cut side up, so the juices will reduce and intensify during baking. Baked this way, there is also less of a tendency for the juices to leak into the crust.

EQUIPMENT: One 9-inch (23-cm) fluted tart pan with removable bottom

THE CRUST

- Unsalted butter for preparing the tart pan
- 8 tablespoons (4 ounces; 120 g) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- ½ cup (100 g) sugar (less)
- ⅛ teaspoon pure almond extract
- ⅛ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- A pinch of fine sea salt
- ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon (180 g) unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons finely ground unblanched almonds

THE CREAM

- ½ cup (12.5 cl) heavy cream
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon pure almond extract
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

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2 tablespoons raw full-flavored honey, such as lavender
 1 tablespoon superfine flour, such as Wondra

About ²/₂ pounds (750 g) fresh apricots, pitted and halved (do not peel)
 plums / peaches / nectarines

Confectioners' sugar, for garnish

↳ thick sliced

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C; gas mark 5).
2. Butter the bottom and sides of the tart pan and set aside.
3. In a large bowl, combine the butter and sugar and, with a wooden spoon, stir to blend. Add the almond and vanilla extracts, salt, and flour, and stir to form a soft, cookielike dough. Do not let it form a ball. Transfer the dough to the center of the buttered pan. Using the tips of your fingers, evenly press the pastry onto the bottom and sides of the pan. The dough will be quite thin.
4. Place the pan in the center of the oven and bake until the dough is slightly puffy and set, about 12 to 15 minutes. Sprinkle the almonds on the crust. (This will prevent the crust from becoming soggy.)
5. Meanwhile, prepare the cream: In a medium-size bowl, combine the cream, egg, almond and vanilla extracts, and honey, and whisk to blend. Whisk in the flour.
6. Starting just inside the edge of the prebaked pastry pan, neatly overlap the halved apricots, cut side up, at a slight angle. Make 2 or 3 concentric circles, working toward the center. Fill the center with the remaining apricots. — Press DOWN
7. Pour the cream evenly over the fruit. Place in the center of the oven and bake until the filling is firm and the pastry is a deep golden brown, 50 to 60 minutes. The apricots will shrivel slightly. Remove to a rack to cool. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar just before serving.

EIGHT SERVINGS

VARIATION: To prepare this tart with fresh raspberries, prebake the dough as directed. Add the cream and bake until the filling is firm and the pastry is a deep golden brown, about 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool. At serving time, arrange a single layer of raspberries (about 12 ounces; 375 g) on top of the filling. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar just before serving.