

Regional Cuisine: As American As Apple Pie

We love baseball, hot dogs, apple pie and Chevrolet - or so an old ad for Chevrolet tells us. Apple pie is as American as... well.. apple pie. If baseball is the All-American sport, then apple pie is the all-American dessert. And while the internet and book stores have spread the recipes far and wide, there are classic apple desserts in every region that are characteristic of the cuisine for that area. Wherever Johnny Appleseed spread orchards, there are recipes that make use of other regional ingredients and traditions to create unique desserts with apples and - whatever!

If you think of apple pie as having two crusts and a filling of apples combined with sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg, some of the regional variations may surprise you. Apple cobbler, apple pandowdy, apple puff, apple crisp, apple brown betty are all variations of apple pie in different regions. The prevailing apple recipes for any region may be affected by the variety of apple that's hardiest and most popular in that area, as well as the style of cuisine that's prevalent.

In New England, for instance, most apple recipes call for Pippins, Granny Smith's or other firm fleshed, sweet varieties of apple that cook up well and lose little moisture when being baked. In Maine, it's not uncommon to find blueberries in your apple pie. In Massachusetts, cranberry apple pie is a favorite. In Vermont, the apples may be sweetened with honey or maple syrup. And in many restaurants on Cape Cod, rather than vanilla ice cream, your piping hot slice of heaven will be served topped with a slice of melting cheese.

In the Southern states, with their predilection for creamy, lightly spiced foods, the most common apple pie recipes include Apple Cream Pie (made with sour cream) and Apple Bourbon Pie, with raisins soaked in bourbon. Raisins soaked in rum are another popular addition to 'apple pie' in the South, especially in New Orleans. Other additions include rhubarb, diced peaches and walnuts.

Midwestern Apple Pie is the classic apple pie - two flaky crusts packed with thick, sweet, juicy apple slices mounded high and vented to let the fragrant steam escape. In Kansas or Missouri, your apple pie will satisfy any purist - served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream that melts into the syrupy filling and adds the perfect touch of creaminess to the mix.

In the South and Southwest you'll find deep-fried apple pie, a variation that matches melt-in-your-mouth flaky fried crust with sweet, diced apples in a syrupy sauce. And in Pennsylvania, the home of the Pennsylvania Dutch, Apple Crumb Pie and Apple Pandowdy take the place of Apple Pie a la Mode on most restaurant menus.

As American as Apple Pie ... from coast to coast, Americans have done what they do best - taken a classic and adapted it to suit the ingredients and tastes that surround them. Whether you top it with a sprinkle of cinnamon, a dollop of whipped cream or a slice of sharp cheddar, there's no other food that comes close to being the All-American dessert.

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