

Helen's Story - My Good Food Box Friends

In July 2003, I helped organize a forum on Food Security at the University of Toronto that was an exchange of experiences and perspectives between food activists in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) and Toronto. See <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/envireform/conference/local-food/index.html>.

One of the social partners involved with the forum was Food Share. (<http://www.foodshare.net>). Food Share works on food issues "from field to table"; they focus on the entire system that puts food on our tables: from the growing, processing and distribution of food to its purchasing, cooking and consumption. They also operate the [Good Food Box](#), which delivers fruit/vegetable boxes to consumers at wholesale prices. Volunteers run the program while all overhead and transportation costs are covered by government or foundation sources.



With this program, local farmers get access to urban markets while obtaining a fair price for their products. Consumers, often low-income, get access to nutritious foods at affordable prices. I was completely taken by how right this concept felt, and the sense shared responsibility and benefit it promoted. So when it turned out that all the drop-offs in my neighbourhood were full, I started one for my own apartment building.



It has been a wonderful way for my neighbours and I to reinforce the community we've been deliberately building over the past few years. We get together for shared dinner parties... we've done Mardi Gras, St. Patrick's Day, Robbie Burns (complete with men in kilts at left and a piped-in haggis), summer solstice, Christmas Carol sing-a-long, New Year's Eve, birthday parties, etc. -- it would seem we're always on the lookout for an excuse to get together, cook, drink some wine and talk, talk, talk!

We often swap stuff out of our Good Food Boxes – this week I traded half my cabbage for two mini bok choy – share recipes, and get together to use up our left-over vegetables. Recently, faced with a sunny Sunday afternoon and an excess of apples, I dug out my grandmother's apple pie recipe and baked away. A few telephone calls later I was happily surrounded by ten of my neighbours, a couple of bottles of wine and some lively conversation. Below is my grandmother's recipe. I hope you share it with folks you enjoy spending time with.

Apple Pie

1 double pie crust (recipe below)
2 tbsp. bread crumbs (kind of optional)
8 large apples sliced (I use granny smith because they're tart; Macintosh also makes pretty good pies. About 7 cups worth.)
1/2 to 1 cup sugar
4 tbsp. flour
1 tsp. cinnamon (optional)

Roll out one of the piecrusts and place on pie plate. My grandmother likes to sprinkle with breadcrumbs because they soak up the juice of the apples so this bottom crust doesn't fall apart. I do this if I actually have bread in the kitchen, but I don't let me it stop me from making the pies if I don't. Combine apples with sugar, cinnamon if using and flour and then fill the pastry shell, mounding the apples higher in the centre. Roll out the other crust and place on top (use rolling pin to pick up the dough and place it evenly over the pie). Flute the edges. Make an egg wash if desired (mix one egg with a little water); brush on top and around the edges to seal the pie. This gives the pie a lovely brown colour during baking. Cut a slit or two in the top and bake at about 400 degrees for 45 minutes. Keep an eye on it for the last 10 minutes or so as it can go pretty fast.

Sour Cream Pastry

Rich and flaky, almost like a puff pastry. I only make pie very occasionally but almost always using this pastry. Someone invariably comments that it is the best pastry they have ever eaten. Of course, given the amount of butter, there's no surprise there. I use my cuisinart to make pastry because it's so fast and easy. If you do this, make sure you don't over-process the pastry. I put the butter (cut into chunks), the sour cream and a little emergency water all in the freezer for about 15-30 minutes before I use them.

1 cup chilled butter, cut into one-inch chunks
1 1/2 cups flour
1/2 cup cold sour cream
a little ice water if necessary

Traditional method: Put flour in bowl. Cut in butter until it resembles coarse oatmeal. Add sour cream and mix just until the pastry begins to hang together. (Use a little water if necessary.) Form into a ball, divide into two, cover each half with plastic wrap, flatten into a disk, and put in fridge for at least 4 hours. (I never think to make this enough in advance so I just put in freezer for 20-30 minutes). Before rolling, let stand for a few minutes to remove chill. Roll out on a lightly floured board or surface.

Cuisinart method: Put chunks of butter in bottom of bowl, pressing down into steel knife. (Do not use dough knife). Put flour on top. Put on lid and process using on-off pulsing only, about 8 or 10 times, or until it resembles coarse oatmeal. Add sour cream and process only until the pastry begins to hang together. Use a little ice water if necessary. Remove, form into a ball, divide into two, cover each half with plastic wrap and follow the instructions above.

