

Greg's Apple Tart with Thyme Custard

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Inspired by: [Basco Fine Foods](#) and Chewtown



INGREDIENTS:

For the tart:

- 1/2 recipe quick puff pastry, chilled
- 3 large red or gold baking apples such as Pippin, Northern Spy or Golden Russet
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 tbsp superfine
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tbsp water
- 1 egg yolk, beaten
- 4 thyme sprigs, leaves removed
- 3 tbsp apricot jam

For the apple puree:

- 3 large red or gold baking apples
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/2 cup superfine sugar
- 2 oz. calvados (apple brandy)
- 4 thyme sprigs, leaves removed
- 1 tsp vanilla paste or vanilla extract
- 1 tsp (approx) fresh lemon zest (half of one lemon, grated fine)
- 1 tbsp lemon juice

- 2 tbsp water

For the thyme custard:

- 2 cups fresh whole milk
- 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream
- Small bunch of fresh wild thyme
- 1 piece of lemon peel, no white rind on it (use vegetable peeler to get strips from half of lemon; grate the other side fine for the puree)
- 1/2 cup superfine sugar
- 5 egg yolks

DIRECTIONS:

For the custard:

- Rinse lemon and use vegetable peeler to peel thin strips from half the lemon, avoiding any of the white pith. Grate the other side of the lemon with a fine rasp and reserve the grated lemon for the apple puree.
- Heat the milk and cream with the thyme sprigs and lemon peel and simmer gently for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, cover with cling film and allow to infuse for 10 minutes.
- In a large bowl, whisk the egg yolks and superfine sugar until pale and thick. Return the milk mixture to the heat, bring to the boil, remove from the heat and strain without the thyme or lemon peel. Pour a small amount of the hot milk mixture into the egg mixture and mix well. Gradually add remaining milk and mix well.
- Return the mix to the pan and with a wooden spoon stir constantly on a gentle heat without allowing the mixture to boil until a nice custard of heavy cream (or runny pudding) consistency is achieved. It takes about 10 minutes. Be very careful not to heat too quickly or it may become grainy or -- worse yet -- curdled. It will become more difficult to move the spoon through the mixture as it thickens. You can test the consistency by dipping the spoon in the custard, lifting it up and running your finger across the flat surface: if the straight line stays, you're close, but taste it to make sure you have achieved the desired consistency.

For the apple puree:

- Peel the apples and cut into quarters. Remove the core and chop roughly into small pieces. In a skillet, melt the butter and add the chopped apple and sugar, frying it fairly quickly until the apple starts to caramelize and soften up.
- Add the calvados and flambé with a lighter or brûlée torch. Once flames subside, add in the lemon zest, thyme leaves, lemon juice, and a bit of water.
- Allow the mixture to cook on a low heat until very soft. Set aside and allow to cool down.

For the tart:

- Pre-heat the oven to 350°F.
- Roll out half of the pastry about 3/8" thick. Cut out a 12" round and transfer it to a parchment-lined baking sheet. Cut arcs about 3/4" wide from remaining dough. Roll out other half of pastry 3/8" thick and cut out small leaf shapes using small cookie cutters. Note: you may need to cut some arcs from this second sheet of dough to have enough to cover the tart edge.
- Beat the egg yolk and thin it with about 1 tbsp water. Brush the egg wash around the perimeter of the tart base and layer on first the arcs all the way around the puff pastry disc to make an edge to the tart, butting ends together to make a ring. Prick the base of the tart with a fork. Spread the apple puree across the entire base. Brush the ring layer with egg wash and apply leaf-shaped pieces in a slightly overlapping pattern all the way around the edge. Shapes will drape over the outside edge and overlap the apple puree a bit on the inside. (Note: If you have any leftover leaves, you can bake them alongside the tart to use as a garnish or snack; remove them from the oven when browned, about 10 minutes.)
- Peel the apples and cut into thirds. Remove the core from each third and place into a large bowl with the lemon juice and a bit of water, tossing the apples to coat them in the lemon juice. This will keep the apple chunks from browning before you can slice them. Once all the apples are peeled and cored, slice them about 1/8" thick using a mandoline. This creates uniform thin slices. Once apples are sliced, return them to the bowl, which should still have a bit of lemon juice in it.
- Arrange the apple slices around the edge of the tart, overlapping the tart crust slightly for the outside layer. Start with the larger slices, and overlap each apple to fan around the perimeter. When you get to the first apple slice, just continue along in front of the outside apples circling in right to the center of the tart. As you get closer to the middle, you will need to use the smallest and thinnest slices until you cover the middle. For the center you may want to take your cookie cutter and cut out some small leaves from the apple slices to cover the middle. Sprinkle the tart with thyme leaves, superfine sugar and a few knobs of butter.

- Bake in the oven for about 45 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through. Remove from the oven and let cool for a few minutes, then transfer to a rack.
- Place the apricot jam into a small pan and cover slightly with water, place on a low heat and melt with a whisk until a uniform glaze is formed. Brush the tart with the apricot glaze until all shiny.
- Cut the tart into portions and serve with the thyme custard.

NOTES:

Notes from Chef Javier De La Hormaza, upon whose recipe mine is based:

"Basque apple tart or Tarta de manzana is a classic pastry dessert served in many restaurants and patisserie shops across the Basque region. The origin of this dessert comes from neighbour France and the adaptation of this classic French dessert to many Basque patisserie shops during the late 19th century as a way of offering discerning clients quality Parisian patisserie products.

There are many variations on the recipe, some recipes use short crust pastry, others puff pastry, some fill the tart with apple compote and other recipes use pastry cream. However, one element all recipes agree on is the top layer of thinly sliced apples, brushed with butter, baked in the oven until golden brown and finished with a glaze of apricot jam.

I like to serve my apple tart with a light thyme crème anglaise. The thyme infused custard pairs really well with the baked apple flavour."