

## To Raise a Coffin

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### Self-Supporting Hot Water Pastry

- 12 oz flour (half whole wheat pastry flour, half unbleached all purpose flour)
- 1 tsp salt
- 3 oz lard
- 3/4 cup water
- Egg white or water for sealing edges

1. Mix the flour and salt in a heat-safe bowl, making a well in it.
2. Heat the water and lard together until the lard is fully melted and the water has barely begun to bubble.
3. Pour the heated water and lard into the well in the flour and stir vigorously.
4. Knead the dough until smooth and elastic.

For raising the coffins while the dough is warm:

5. Separate the dough into two pieces, one roughly twice to three times the size of the other.
6. Use your hands to form the larger piece of dough into a bowl shape, like making a “pinch pot” in ceramics class. Or, if you have a wooden form (pie dolly), flour it well and raise the dough around it.
7. Roll or pat out the smaller piece into a lid.
8. Fill pie, place lid on top, and seal / crimp edges.

For slab-building:

9. Divide dough in half, then divide one half in half again. Wrap all pieces in plastic wrap or damp cloths and let sit at least 4 hours to cool completely. (I do this in the refrigerator or my cold garage overnight.)
10. Roll out one of the smaller portions of pastry on a lightly floured surface to between 1/4 and 1/2 inch thick. Cut into a neat circle. This will be your bottom crust.
11. Shape the larger piece into a log or snake and roll out into a rectangle as long as the circumference of the circle you just made; this will be your side walls. Cut the long edges neatly and evenly.
12. Roll out the final piece into a circle slightly larger than the bottom crust, to make a top.
13. Recommended: Let all pieces rest in a cool place for 15 to 30 minutes.
14. Brush the bottom crust with egg white or water. Egg white works better.
15. Form the wall piece into a cylinder and place on top of the bottom crust. Ensure the sides are even all around, and use your fingers to seal the joints together.
16. Brush the ends of the side wall piece with egg white or water and seal well, completing the sides of the coffin.
17. Optional: I am experimenting with letting the coffin dry for a long period of time (24-48 hours) before filling and baking. I have not yet perfectly worked out this method, but encourage you to try it too.
18. Fill the pie, place the lid on top and crimp and seal the edges (if you didn't dry the coffin out -- I am still figuring out the best method to add the lid if the pieces have been dried)

Baking:

19. Bake at 350°F for at least 90 minutes, depending on thickness of the walls and type of filling.

Note: In experiments with a wood-fired oven, I have found that most medieval pies work fine when cooked even longer at a lower temperature, as many pie recipes call for the filling to be cooked before going in the pie. I give you permission to experiment with baking times and temperatures.

## **Richer Pastry (baked in a springform pan)**

- 20 oz flour (half whole wheat pastry flour, half unbleached all purpose flour)
  - 7 oz fat (lard or suet)
  - 1 cup water
  - 2 tsp salt
1. Mix the flour and salt in a heat-safe bowl, making a well in it.
  2. Heat the water and lard together until the lard is fully melted and the water has barely begun to bubble.
  3. Pour the heated water and lard into the well in the flour and stir vigorously.
  4. Knead the dough until smooth and elastic.
  5. Separate  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the dough to use as a lid.
  6. Roll out both pieces of dough. Use the larger piece to line a large springform pan.
  7. Fill the pie, add the lid, crimp and seal edges.
  8. Bake at 350°F for 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 hours, depending on filling. Note: you may find it helpful to take the pie out of the oven after 90 minutes, remove the sides of the pan, and return the pie to the oven for a half hour to solidify the sides of the crust more.

## **Things I'm Still Experimenting With:** (That you might play with too)

- Pie molds (like a springform pan) to keep the sides upright during baking.
- Using a wooden pie dolly to raise a coffin, or a large wooden form to build a coffin around.
- Fancy decorated top crusts and pies in whimsical shapes generally.
- Comparative analysis -- did different types of fillings call for different types of crust? Were some fillings always baked in coffins while others were baked in a trap?
- Drying / curing a coffin before filling and baking.
- All of my research has focused on England between 1250 and 1390. I am just starting to move ahead and read 15th and 16th century recipes.
- I've gotten really interested in early Colonial American cooking, which got me into reading 17th and 18th century English recipes. I would like to do some kind of comparative pie recipes through the ages project.
- I have not played around with historical pastry recipes from other places; I am an Anglophile. I would love to talk to people who are trying out other recipes -- I know the German corpus has some great ones!
- 16th century English recipes universally use butter as their fat. I have had a really hard time getting butter-based crusts to stand up straight. I have a few ideas that I'm testing, but this has been a source of frustration.
- There's a mention of puff pastry at the very end of *Forme of Cury*, but not enough information to call it a recipe. This is something I want to play with.

Have fun. Bake pie.