

Pasteís de nata (Pasteís de Belém, Egg Tarts)



Background

The first known pasteís de nata were developed in a Lisbon monastery in the mid-19th century as a way to deal with leftover egg yolks, as egg whites were used for a variety of purposes. Out of many bakery creations emerged the now internationally famous egg tarts, custard-like treats inside a flaky crust. During the time of Portugal colonization of the Chinese island of Macau and Hong Kong, the egg tarts made their way to the Asian continent and even today are a significant staple in Chinese bakeries. In fact, even some Asian Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants offer the highly desired egg tarts. Today, you can commonly find egg tarts in almost any Chinatown bakery in North American cities.

Ingredients

For custard filling:

4 medium egg yolks

$\frac{3}{4}$ c. hot water

6 tbsp. sugar

$\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ c. evaporated milk

dash of vanilla

For dough:

you can purchase already prepared pie crust or make yours from scratch as specified below.*

2 c. cake flour

1 stick unsalted butter

¼ c. powdered sugar

2 tbsp. beaten egg

1/8 tsp. salt

dash of vanilla

*For a traditional pastry shell, use puff pastry instead of pie crust. Be sure to roll it out thin and leave no air pockets between the puff pastry and the tart pan.

Instructions

Make custard

- Melt sugar, salt with hot water. Mix until dissolved, let cool.
- Whisk egg yolks, stir in cooled sugar water, add evaporated milk and vanilla. Combine well.
- Strain filling and chill in refrigerator while you make pastry.

Make Pastry (if necessary)

- In large bowl, sift flour, sugar and salt. Add softened butter. Bring the mixture together with your hands.
- Add 2 tbsp. beaten egg and bring together until smooth. Be careful not to knead dough too much.
- Cover dough with plastic wrap, refrigerate for 30 minutes or until dough is firm.
- Take the dough out and divide into 16 equal portions.
- Spray tart pan (i.e. muffin pan) lightly with oil.
- Take one portion of dough, roll into a ball, place in one shell in the tart pan. Press dough into the shell with your fingers. Repeat with the remaining dough portions.

Baking

- Pour custard filling into shells about 80% full. Bake 15-20 minutes until surface becomes golden brown and a toothpick can stand in the egg tart.
- Cool slightly, then remove from pan. **Serve warm.**

Optional:

- Sprinkle cinnamon on top after baking, OR
- Caramelize the top of the egg tarts with a crème brûlée torch for a Macau-style finish.