

# Chicken Pot Pie Warms a Chilly Night

Roast the chicken and vegetables for bigger flavors in the filling

BY CATHIE GUNTLI

**A**s you break through the lid of a chicken pot pie, the golden pastry crackles and then releases fragrant, mouthwatering steam. As your fork dives deeper, you find a wealth of roasted chicken and vegetables, bound in a rich, amber sauce seasoned with thyme and rosemary. Bring just one bite to your mouth, and you can't stop eating until the last crumb of flaky pastry has mopped up every bit of sauce.

I can think of few dishes that offer this kind of sensory satisfaction, which is why chicken pot pie is on my menu every night.

## DELICIOUS CHICKEN POT PIE, EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

For me, the key to making a great chicken pot pie is to make each element in the dish taste good enough to eat on its own. That's why I roast the ingredients rather than boil them, as most recipes call for. Roasting brings a deep, full flavor to the chicken, and the method caramelizes the vegetables to coax out their sweetness. I roast the chicken and vegetables in the same pan, and their delicious pan juices become part of the sauce.

I top my pie with a pastry that makes a flaky, buttery crust but is no more difficult to make than a basic pie dough. I call it "rough puff pastry" because it's a simplified version of traditional puff pastry, but it's also a dough that looks disconcertingly rough until you've rolled it out a couple of times.

## ONE PAN MAKES A POT-PIE FILLING OF MANY FLAVORS

Roasting the chicken and vegetables in the same flameproof pan ensures that every bit of flavor makes it to the filling. Because you use the same pan (with all its delicious juices) to make the sauce on the stove, chicken pot pie is virtually a one-pan meal.

Make sure your pan is heavy, so nothing burns during roasting or saucemaking. Choose a size that fits the chicken and vegetables comfortably, with enough room to stir the vegetables once or twice during roasting.

You don't need to truss the chicken since you're going to pull the meat from the bones, and so the final shape of the roasted chicken is irrelevant. Do try to get a nice, naturally processed bird, and remove any visible fat from the cavity. I roast the bird upside down, which means the delicate breast meat is both protected from the drying heat of the oven and basted by the juices that drip into the pan.

You can use almost any vegetable you like in the recipe. I'm suggesting the classic mix of potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, and peas. I also like winter vegetables, such as parsnips, turnips, leeks, and sweet potatoes, because they hold their shape well and they're delicious roasted.

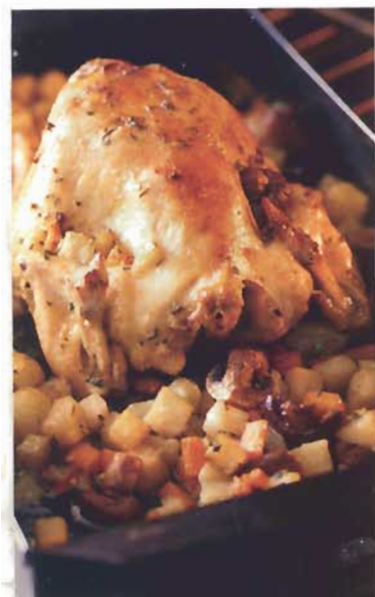
If you want to make a vegetable pot pie, substitute about four cups of chopped vegetables for the chicken and roast as directed for about 45 minutes. You can use vegetable stock instead of chicken stock for the sauce, too.

## PASTRY WITH ALL OF THE PUFF AND LESS OF THE WORK

Rough puff pastry uses a technique called "turning" (see the photos on p. 27). Every time you fold over, or "turn," the dough, you're creating a layer that will puff up in the oven.

One of the keys to success with this kind of dough is keeping all your ingredients cold—even the flour. When a dough gets warm, the butter melts, which

*The seductive power of comfort food. This home-cooking favorite is irresistible when you treat each element as if it had to taste good enough to eat on its own.*



*Chicken-pot-pie filling needs only one pan. Roasting the chicken and vegetables in the same flameproof pan ensures that every bit of flavor makes it to the filling.*



means the layers won't separate during baking. You'll get tough, greasy pastry.

Ideally, your hands (which are warm) should never touch the dough as you're shaping and turning it. I use a plastic pastry scraper to fold the dough over or to scoot dough back in line.

**"Are you sure this is right?"**

That's what people always ask me when I show them how to make rough puff pastry. It's hard to believe the dry, crumbly mess on the counter will ever turn into manageable dough. I quickly let them know they're doing fine; it's supposed to look strange at first.

You start by chopping butter and flour together on a large cutting board. Next you use a spatula to mix in just a little cold water, and then you begin to coax this shaggy substance into shape, using a rolling pin. That's when skepticism turns to admiration—the mess becomes a smooth, easy-to-handle dough.

#### CHICKEN POT PIE OF ANY SIZE, ANY TIME

Once you've made the filling and the dough, you can assemble and bake the pies immediately or refrigerate the ingredients for another day. I think the filling tastes even better after a day in the refrigerator. If you really want to get a jump on things, make the pastry a few weeks ahead—it freezes beautifully.



*The roasting pan becomes a saucepan. When you use a flameproof pan to roast the chicken and vegetables, you can put the pan directly on the stove and use the drippings to make the sauce.*

**Rough puff pastry looks like a dry, crumbly mess at first, but it turns into a smooth dough.**

Your pot pie can be any size you like, but be sure the dishes you use are ovenproof. To cut out a potpie top to fit your dish, just turn the dish onto the dough and use it as template. I like to cut the tops a little larger and press the extra crust along the outside of the dish; no one complains about having too much flaky crust on a chicken pot pie.

The final step is an assembly-line construction of the pies. Portion the filling and sauce into the dish, top with the pastry, crimp the edges, brush with egg wash (to brown the pastry), and bake. The filling almost always bubbles over a little as the pie bakes, so I put the pies in the oven on a baking sheet.

While no one's found a way to keep people from opening the oven to peek at what smells so good, try telling them they'll get a puffier pie if they keep the door closed.

#### Chicken Pot Pie *very good*

A flameproof roasting pan is key to this recipe. The chicken and vegetables are cooked in the same pan, which you'll also use to make a flavorful sauce. *Yields six 12-ounce pies, or one 2-quart pie.*

*One 3-lb. chicken*

*3 Tbs. olive oil*

*Salt and freshly ground black pepper*

*2 cups ½-inch potato chunks (1 to 2 medium peeled potatoes; I prefer Yukon gold)*

*24 pearl onions, peeled and left whole*

*2 cups ½-inch carrot chunks (2 to 3 medium carrots, peeled)*

*1 clove garlic, peeled and minced*

*8 mushrooms, halved or quartered*

*2 Tbs. chopped assorted fresh herbs (parsley, rosemary, thyme); more to taste*

*1 cup peas (fresh or frozen and defrosted)*

#### FOR THE SAUCE:

*4 cups chicken stock (homemade or low-salt canned)*

*6 Tbs. butter (as needed)*

*6 Tbs. flour*

*Salt and freshly ground black pepper*

#### FOR THE PASTRY:

*1 recipe Rough Puff Pastry (opposite), refrigerated*

#### FOR THE EGG WASH:

*1 egg yolk, beaten*

*½ cup cream*

**To roast the chicken and vegetables**—Heat the oven to 375°F. Rub the chicken with 1 Tbs. of the olive oil and sprinkle generously, inside and out, with salt and pepper.

Toss the potatoes, onions, carrots, garlic, and mushrooms with the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil and the chopped herbs.

Set the chicken upside down in a large flameproof roasting pan and scatter the vegetables around the chicken. Roast for 1 hour and 15 min., stirring the vegetables several times.



*This pile of crumbs turns into a smooth dough. Roll the dough into a 6x18-inch rectangle.*



*A flat, plastic scraper is invaluable. Use this tool to fold the two short sides of the rectangle to the center.*

Remove the chicken from the pan to cool. Remove the vegetables with a slotted spoon and reserve them in a bowl, with the peas. Don't rinse out the roasting pan.

**To make the sauce**—Pour the fat and juices into a measuring cup or gravy separator. Spoon or pour the fat away from the juice; reserve the fat. Add the juices to the chicken stock. Measure out the fat and add enough butter (if needed) to make 6 Tbs.

Put the roasting pan (which should still have the caramelized bits from the chicken and vegetables) on the stove over medium heat. Pour in the 6 Tbs. of fat and butter mixture; when it's melted and bubbling, add the flour and stir constantly to make a smooth roux. Scrape up any caramelized remains from the chicken and vegetables. Cook the roux, stirring constantly, until lightly browned, about 5 min. Add the chicken stock, bring to a boil, and simmer. Continue to stir and scrape the bottom of the pan. Cook the sauce for at least 15 min., whisking occasionally, until it's as thick as heavy cream. Season with salt, pepper, and more herbs to taste.

When the chicken has cooled, pull the meat from the bones, discarding the skin and bones. Cut the meat into small (1/2- to 1-inch) chunks and set aside.

**To assemble the pot pies:** Heat the oven to 400°F. Choose four 12-oz. ovenproof bowls or a 2-qt. casserole.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator. Lay it on a floured board and roll it out 1/8 inch thick into a 20x16-inch rectangle. Set the dish for the pot pie upside down on the dough and cut around the rim with a knife or pastry cutter. (If you like extra pastry, cut the pastry a little larger than the top of the dish.) Stack the pastry pieces on a plate, separating each with waxed paper or plastic wrap. Refrigerate until ready to use.

Divide the chicken, vegetables, and sauce among the dishes. Lay the pastry on top, pressing along the edge of the dish to seal.



*Complete the "turn." Fold the bottom end to the top, as if you were closing a wallet.*

**To make the egg wash**—Blend the egg yolk and cream. Brush the mixture onto the pastry with a pastry brush.

Put the pies on a baking sheet to catch any drips. Bake on the center rack in the 400°F oven for 50 to 55 min., or until the crust is thoroughly browned and puffed. Steam will escape along the edges of the pastry.

### Rough Puff Pastry

Don't use a food processor to chop the butter and flour; it warms the butter and makes the pieces too small. Flour amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and volume (cups). Use either measurement. *Yields 1 1/2 pounds pastry.*

*3/4 lb. (3 sticks) cold, unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces*  
*13 1/2 oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour, chilled; more for dusting the work surface*  
*1 tsp. salt*  
*2/3 cup chilled water*

Put the butter pieces on a large work surface and chop them roughly with a knife. Dump the chilled flour and the salt on top of the butter and use a large knife or a pastry blender to cut the butter and flour together. When well combined (the mixture still will be very dry and rough), add the water, a small amount at a time, and mix with a knife or large spatula or a pastry scraper. You'll



No cookie cutters necessary. Turn the dish onto the dough and use it as a template. The author cuts her dough a little larger and presses the extra pastry along the outside of the dish.

An individual pot pie is irresistible. It means every bite is yours to savor.



have a very crude, dry-looking mixture, but don't worry: it all comes together.

Scrape the dough aside to dust your work surface with flour and then begin rolling out the crumbly dough into a 6x18-inch rectangle. Use a flat, plastic scraper (or the spatula's edge) to fold the two short sides of the rectangle to the center; then fold the bottom end to the top, as if you were closing a wallet. You now have a rectangle that's roughly 4½x6 inches.

Turn the dough 90° clockwise so that the seam is on the right side. Roll it out again to form a 6x18-inch rectangle. You may need to continue lightly dusting the dough and the work surface with flour to keep the rolling pin from sticking to the dough. Repeat the folding process (you'll have a small rectangle again), seal the dough in plastic wrap, and refrigerate it for at least 15 min.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator and roll it out to a 6x18-inch rectangle. Repeat the fold-and-roll process twice more. The dough should be smooth. Seal the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.

*Cathie Guntli is the chef/owner of the Liberty Café in San Francisco, where she'll never take chicken pot pie off the menu. ♦*



## Wine Choices

### Simple wines for comfort food

Look for a white wine that's rather substantial to match the dish's overall body. A slightly herbal Sauvignon Blanc, such as Kenwood or Caymus, will bring out the herbs in the pot pie while adding a clean, refreshing finish. A fairly rich Chardonnay, such as Wente Bros. or Fetzer Barrel Select, will pick up on the buttery, toasty pastry crust.

As for reds, you don't need anything pricey—just make it dry, with a light to medium body. An inexpensive Pinot Noir such as Meridian or Kendall-Jackson, a light Rhone-style wine like Bonny Doon's Clos de Gilroy, an Italian Valpolicella (try Bolla or Masi) or a Spanish Rioja (Bodegas Montecillo or Marqués de Cáceres) would work nicely. And speaking of Spain, a good dry sherry (oloroso, fino, or amontillado) would bring lovely nutty, caramelized flavors to the pairing.

—Rosina Tinari Wilson, a food and wine writer and teacher in the San Francisco area, is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*.