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Granny's Tomato Pie – Twice Told

This recipe started in my granny's cookbook. Over time, it's changed — shaped along the way by Vivian Howard and Melissa Clark — and grown into something a little more elevated while still keeping Granny's spirit at the center. The cornmeal crust is my own addition: it gives the pie an extra bite that I think she'd have liked.

Serves 10 — for use with a separately prepared 9-inch pie crust, blind-baked

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon butter, for cooking onions
- 1 large yellow onion, halved and cut thinly
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons salt, divided (for tomatoes/onions)
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper, freshly ground
- 3½ pounds tomatoes, cut into ½-inch dice, divided (Roasted and Fresh are used; Gold medal, Cherokee, Brandywine and Roma are recommended for this dish. Think meaty.)
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar, divided (for tomatoes)
- ⅓ cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup Fontina cheese, grated
- ⅔ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated (Asiago and Romano works well too)
- ½ cup fresh basil leaves, picked. (Fresh is key but dried works in a pinch).
- ½ teaspoon fresh thyme, picked

Instructions

1. Caramelize the onions. Melt the butter in a medium pan over low heat. Add the onion with ½ teaspoon of salt and cook slowly, stirring occasionally, until deeply caramelized, about 45-50 minutes.

2. Roast the tomatoes. While the onions cook, preheat the oven to 400°F for roasting the tomatoes (you'll lower it to 375°F later for the final bake). Toss half of the tomatoes with the olive oil, half the divided salt, the black pepper, and half the divided sugar. Spread in a single layer on a sheet tray with as much room as possible between pieces. Don't overcrowd. Best to use two roasting pans to avoid crowding. Roast 20–30 minutes until deeply caramelized and slightly dried at the edges. Let almost all the juices evaporate or your pie will be too wet.

3. Salt and drain the fresh tomatoes. Toss the remaining tomatoes with the thyme and the remaining salt and sugar. Let sit in a colander to drain excess liquid while the roasted tomatoes and onions finish, at least 20–30 minutes. — occasionally moving the tomatoes around in the colander to encourage the liquid to leave them evenly.

4. Assemble the filling and topping. Lower the oven to 375°F. In a bowl, combine the roasted tomatoes, fresh tomatoes, caramelized onions, remaining sugar and basil. Spoon this mixture into your blind-baked crust.

5. Top and bake. Mix the mayonnaise and both cheeses into a thin paste. Spread evenly over the filling. Bake for 30 minutes. Enjoy. Maybe let it rest for 20 minutes before cutting.