

Chocolate Pear Tart

California Cooking: Parties, Picnics & Celebrations

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Makes one 10-inch tart

Shortbread Crust

9 tablespoons unsalted butter
9 tablespoons sifted confectioners' sugar
1½ cups sifted unbleached all-purpose flour

Chocolate Layer

6 ounces semisweet or bittersweet chocolate
2 tablespoons unsalted butter

Poached Pears

2 cups water
1-cup sugar
a 1-inch piece of vanilla bean (or 1 teaspoon vanilla extract)
½ cinnamon stick
Splash of Cognac
4 pears (preferably Bosc), Peeled, halved, stemmed, and cored

Glaze

1 12-ounce jar of apricot preserves
2 tablespoons curacao or other orange liquor, and cored

Garnish

¼ cup sliced almonds, toasted

1. Preheat the oven to 350F
2. To make the shortbread crust, cram together the butter and sugar. Blend in the flour to make soft dough. Add 1 more tablespoon butter if the mixture will not incorporate all the flour.
3. Pat the dough evenly by hand into the bottom and 1 ½ to 2 inches up the sides of a 10-inch spring form pan. Prick well with a fork. Bake for 12-15 minutes, until golden brown. Let cool completely.
4. Melt the chocolate and butter in a double boiler over simmering water. Spread on the bottom and sides of the tart shell and let cool until the chocolate hardens.
5. To prepare the-poached pears, bring the water and sugar to a boil over medium heat in a large saucepan, stirring only until the sugar is dissolved. Add the vanilla bean, lemon peel, cinnamon stick, and cognac and cook for 5 minutes. Add the pears and poach for 10 to 15 minutes, until they can be easily pierced with a sharp paring knife. Let cool in the syrup.
6. For the glaze, put the apricot preserves in a food processor fitted with the steel blade and process until smooth. Strain and add the liquor.
7. To assemble, drain the pears well, pat them dry, cut crosswise into ¼ -inch slices, and arrange carefully in the tart shell. Brush the pears with some of the apricot glaze and sprinkle with the toasted almonds.

