

Classic French Apple Tart

A classic apple tart differs from an American apple pie in three ways: it has no top, the pastry is lined with a layer of applesauce, and the apples are very thinly sliced. When you slice the apple halves, leave a tiny strip uncut near one end, so the slices are still attached to one another. Then before you arrange the slices in the tart shell, cut away the tiny strip that holds them together. This allows you to more easily shape small groups of the slices in the pastry shell.

MAKES ONE 9-INCH TART

- 8 large Golden Delicious or tart baking apples, peeled, halved, and cored**
- 1/2 lemon**
- 1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar**
- 1/2 cup water**
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise (optional)**
- Basic Pie and Tart Dough (see page 445)**
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted**
- 2 tablespoons apricot glaze (see page 470), optional**

How to Use a Tart Ring

Professional bakers, especially European bakers, often bake tarts in simple rings with no bottoms. These give the tart elegant smooth sides. There's no trick to using tart rings but be careful not to forget that there's no bottom support. If you try to lift the tart by lifting on the sides, it will fall apart. A tart with no bottom plate can be moved with two wide spatulas or by sliding the round disk that fits in the traditional fluted rings under the tart.

Peel, halve, and core the apples and rub the halves with the lemon. Then squeeze the juice from the lemon half and set aside. Cut half of the apples into 1/3-inch cubes (don't spend a lot of time doing this precisely) and put them in a wide saucepan with the lemon juice, 1/2 cup of the sugar, the water, and the vanilla bean. Place over medium heat, bring to a simmer, and cook, stirring with a rubber spatula, for about 15 minutes, or until the apples have softened, all the liquid has evaporated, and the mixture has stiffened. Remove from the heat and let cool. Scrape the tiny seeds out of the vanilla bean and add them to the applesauce. Dry the vanilla bean and save to store with sugar to make vanilla-flavored sugar.

Using a plastic vegetable slicer or a chef's knife, thinly slice the remaining apple halves crosswise. If you're using a knife, leave the slices attached to one another by a thin strip at one end. Cut off the strip where the slices are attached, so you detach the slices from each other.

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line a 9- or 10-inch tart ring (see "How to Use a Tart Ring," left) or fluted tart pan with removable bottom with the dough (see page 448). Spread the cooked apple mixture in the tart shell. One at a time, press the sliced apple halves between your palms so they fan out slightly, and arrange them around the sides of the tart shell, setting them on the cooked apple mixture. Fit in extra slices here and there to make the arrangement even. Place some apple slices—use the small end pieces—in the middle of the tart to elevate the apples that will be arranged in the middle, and then fan out a second row of apples around the center of the tart. Use a few apple slices for the tiny round in the middle of the tart. Brush the apples generously with the butter and then sprinkle them with the 1 tablespoon of sugar.

Bake for about 1 hour and 15 minutes, or until the apples are deep golden brown. Transfer to a rack. Brush the top of the tart with the glaze while it is still hot and then let cool.

HOW TO MAKE A CLASSIC FRENCH APPLE TART



1. Spread the cooked apple over a tart pan or ring lined with basic tart dough.



2. Thinly slice the remaining apple halves crosswise, leaving the slices attached by a thin strip at one end, then cut off that strip. Gently press the sliced apple halves between your palms to fan out.



3. Arrange thinly sliced apples over the layer of cooked apple.



4. Brush with butter and sprinkle with sugar.



5. You can also dot liberally with butter and bake.



6. While the tart is still hot, brush the apples with apricot glaze.