

FRENCH TART TENACITY

Just when I thought I didn't need any more tools for my kitchen, my beloved neighbors returned from France with a beautiful rectangular French Tart pan to add to my collection. Having anything in my kitchen made in France fills me with both anxiety and confidence. The anxiety comes from knowing my final plated dish will never rival a classic French chef's, yet the confidence comes from thinking that with the right tools, I might get close.

Anxious to make something worthy of their gift, I scour the internet for French Tart recipes. I thought I'd go savory to start. A mushroom and gruyere tart should hit the spot. I come upon a basic tart dough that seems simple enough, even if it is wildly fattening with 9 tablespoons of butter. That sounds French enough for me.

I measure out a cup and a half of flour, add in a teaspoon of sugar, $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon of salt and give it all a nice stir. I melt the butter as suggested, pour it into the well of the flour mixture with one tablespoon of water and mix. It comes together quickly into an almost clay-like texture.

The directions say to quickly press the dough while warm around the border of the pan and then use the remaining dough to fill in the middle. But as soon as I start working the border, I can see there is no way there's enough dough to fill this pan. I re-read the recipe. I didn't leave anything out. Where did I go wrong?

It takes me a moment before I realize I'm an idiot. This recipe is designed for a 9"-round pan. Although my rectangular pan seems like it's about the same size, it's not. DO THE MATH. A 9"-round is 63 square inches and my pan is an 8" x 11", 88 square inches. Ugh! I should know better. It's late now and I'm hungry and out of patience. Rather than try to

make more dough, I decide to scrap the whole thing and order in Chinese.



The next day, hopefully having learned from my mistake, I take

another stab at it. Although technically it seems as if I only need to increase the recipe by half, I decide to double it just to be sure. Thank goodness I did, because I need every bit of this dough to frame and fill the pan. I press the dough down to even it all out and then dock it as instructed. It doesn't look too bad at all. I place it in the oven to blind bake for fifteen minutes and then move onto the filling.

Prior to making the crust, I prep all my ingredients. I caramelize some onions, sauté the mushrooms, fry some bacon, grate the cheese and chop some herbs. This recipe calls for a cup of ricotta to be mixed with some egg yolk. Once done, it's like a beautiful off-white loose custard. This will be the bed for the other ingredients. Now all I need to do is assemble it all onto the crust.

I pull out the pan from the oven and the dough still looks a bit raw. It's supposed to be a golden brown. Did I get the timing off? Is there too much dough? I put it back in for another five minutes, then another. A total of 30-minutes later, it's finally starting to brown a little. Note to self – don't trust all recipes from the internet.

I let it cool for a bit and then start layer by layer. First the ricotta mixture is smoothed on, then I add the onions, bacon, cheese and herbs. It looks gorgeous. Back into the oven it goes. I start to clean up and then as I bring all the dirty bowls to the sink I realize I forgot to add the mushrooms! The tart has only been in the oven for a few minutes, so I quickly pull it out, almost dropping it, and then I sprinkle the mushrooms on top. As Julia Child would say, who's going to know?

Fortunately, whether the mushrooms were on top of the cheese or underneath it makes no difference. The end product is ready and finally comes out of the pan without cracking. It is picture perfect. The crust tastes like a savory shortbread, holding its shape for looks and crumbling upon each bite. And

the mushroom/bacon/gruyere blend over the ricotta mixture is divine. Well worth the effort, even if it did take two days.

Making something for the first time is always challenging for me, but I do eventually learn from my mistakes. Next time, how does a leek, prosciutto, and egg tart sound to you? Hmm, sounds good to me too.