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MODULE 1 | TRANSCRIPT | LESSON 1

What is Puff Pastry?

In the simplest terms, “pastry” refers to a dough that is made of flour, water, and fat.

The majority of pastry doughs fall into two camps: short-crust pastry and puff pastry. Within these categories there are countless variations, but in general, short-crust pastry is the easiest to make and the most versatile—think pie crust. It doesn’t puff up with layers and has a short, crumbly texture. Puff pastry requires more technique to create flaky layers, and it ultimately has more fat in it than a short-crust pastry dough. We’re focusing on the slightly more fiddly, but super rewarding style of pastry in this course: puff pastry.

The fat we use is dairy-free butter, but conventional pastry doughs can use fats like dairy-full butter, lard, shortening, even margarine. With the exception of cooked pastry dough like choux (aka Pâte à Choux), the fat used to make puff pastry dough must be solid when chilled in order to create the flaky texture puff pastry is known for.

See, puff pastry dough is created by folding dough over chilled and solid fat repeatedly in a process called “lamination,” which basically means to arrange into thin layers. When baked, the fat layered into the dough melts, the water in the butter and dough evaporates and turns to steam, and in turn, it gets trapped between the folds of the dough lifting and creating pockets and flaky layers in the final baked good.

Due to the net-like proteins in conventional gluten-full dough, it’s easier to see defined layers of butter in a cross section of laminated, unbaked puff pastry dough than it is in gluten-free puff pastry. But if the steps we provide are followed, you can trust that the layers are there and you’ll see them in the final bake.

It’s very, very important to respect and follow the resting and chilling times in puff pastry recipes. The fat absolutely must be solid and cold when it goes into a hot oven if you want a layered, flaky result. This is not a technique that you can rush. No cutting corners. Set aside the necessary time, or a day (or 5) in advance of when you need the puff pastry, to enjoy its creation stress free. Think ahead—batch prepare some and freeze and refrigerate for future uses.

In general, to laminate a dough you:

- 1.) Roll it out into a rectangle and then fold it over itself using a letter-fold or book-fold technique.
- 2.) Then, you rotate it 90 degrees, roll it out again, fold it over itself again, and chill for 1-2 hours.

Each time you do this series of steps, it's called a "turn." You then repeat as many turns as you need to create as many layers as you need, always chilling thoroughly between each turn. The more turns you make, the more layers you'll have in your dough. A good general rule of thumb is to do 4–6 turns before baking.

Common examples of laminated doughs include puff pastry, croissant dough, and Danish dough. Puff pastry is an unleavened dough while Danish and croissant doughs are yeast-leavened for rise. The goal for this course is to master unleavened puff pastry, a dough that can be used for sweet and savory applications of all kinds from pies to tarts. Puff pastry designs are only limited by your imagination. They can open-faced or closed like hand pies or folded into intricate braided patterns or breadstick twists.

We'll show you some traditional techniques, but we also use a lot of tricks to make it easier to work with the delicate nature of non-traditional gluten-free, dairy-free puff pastry. We're going to walk you through making a Classic Puff Pastry using a "butter packet", and a "cheater's" Rough Puff Pastry (aka flaky pastry or quick pastry) that's considered easier and less fiddly for some folks. Try them both and then decide what works best for you.

Please note that to get traditional puff pastry lightness, we use gluten-free flours and blends that have been processed to make them lighter and able to create flaky results. Gluten-free, dairy-free puff pastry also requires the use of more starches, and the binder xanthan gum to provide the gluten-like stretch that's necessary to create layers in the dough. We'll show you our favorite store-bought blends, and also how to create your own blend that contains a bit more whole-grain flour.

Also important to note: dairy-free butters that contain cashew are the best in that they thicken a bit when heated and this minimizes leakage from your pastry as it bakes. Dairy-free butters that do not have cashew in the blend work, you may just get some leakage when baking, so make sure you use a rimmed baking sheet to catch any drippings.

Please be sure to read every single resource we provide in this course before you start making puff pastry. This will set you up for success and enjoyment along the way. Read it all, watch it all. Gluten-free, dairy-free puff pastry is a detailed, delicate-but-rewarding process that feels a bit like kitchen alchemy, but by no means is it something that you can't master. We have loads of support, visual references, and tips to make it fun and easy. Practice, be kind to yourself along the way, and have fun.