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MODULE 1 | TRANSCRIPT | LESSON 2

Puff Pastry Techniques

Puff pastry 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.

This is how it works with both conventional puff pastry and with gluten-free, dairy-free puff pastry—the differences are ingredients used and a bit of technique. Due to the net-like proteins in the flour, traditional unbaked puff pastry will have more stretch in it, and if sliced top to bottom, distinct layers in the dough before baking. Gluten-free, dairy-free puff pastry dough doesn't have gluten proteins for stretch, so we use blends or make blends that have xanthan gum in the mix to replace this necessary characteristic. No stretch, no flakes. Also, if sliced top to bottom, a cross section of unbaked gluten-free puff pastry dough won't show distinct layers as well as traditional dough, 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.

If you're practiced in conventional puff pastry creation, you may have an advantage when it comes to technique, but know that there are some differences, and we encourage you to put your beginner's cap on and read through everything we share like it's new information.

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 and batch prepare some and freeze and refrigerate for future uses.

Here are the steps for making a Classic Puff Pastry dough, some tips for keeping it all cold, and a few options for butter-packet incorporation and folding techniques. Learn this Classic Puff Pastry method first—it's the most challenging. Then, you can try our Rough Puff Pastry recipe if you want

something easier. Learn them both for mastery and reference our step-by-step videos to build confidence in whatever method suits you moving forward.

A few quick tips for keeping everything cold as you work:

- Fill a large, rimmed baking sheet with ice cubes. Place your dough bowl directly into the cubes, or on top of a baking rack that's been set over the cubes—the ambient cold will keep everything the right temperature.
- Freeze your rolling pin, pastry cutter, and silicone baking mat (if using) before you need them.
- Fill a large, rimmed baking sheet with ice cubes and place on the countertop where you will be rolling out dough before you work. This will “chill” your countertop and keep ingredients cold. Make sure the counter is wiped totally dry before you use it for rolling out dough.
- As you shape and cut out multiple puff pastries before baking, make a cold surface for you to place creations as they wait to go in the oven. Fill a large, rimmed baking sheet with ice cubes. Place a large cooling rack over the cubes, into the baking sheet. Lay out a baking sheet-sized piece of parchment paper over the baking rack. Place cut out pastry on the parchment—the cold will chill them well. Then, when ready to bake, slide the parchment onto another dry baking sheet and bake.

In general, these are the steps to making Classic Puff Pastry dough:

- 1.) You first make a dough and chill it.
- 2.) Then, you make a butter packet and chill it.
- 3.) Then you incorporate the butter packet into the dough, make the first turn of the dough using a book fold or letter fold, and chill it.
- 4.) Then, complete 3 or more turns using a book fold or letter fold, chilling thoroughly in between each turn, until ready to use/bake.

Now, let's dive into the specifics of each step so you can master it all. Remember, have patience with yourself, keep everything cold, and practice, practice, practice.

First step is to make a dough.

Reference the specific recipes for amounts and flour blend options.

Fill a large glass with ice and water, then set it aside.

Now, chop cold butter into ½" pieces and add them to the flour, coat with flour to instantly create a barrier between the butter and the warmth of your hands, or a pastry cutter. Remember our chilling tips!

Using your hands and/or a pastry cutter (or the tines of a fork), press the cold butter into the flour. If using your hands, push the flour into the butter and roll fingers to incorporate the fat quickly into the dough without melting it—make sure plenty of flour is coating the butter as you work so the warmth from your hands comes into minimal direct contact with the butter. The butter should be thoroughly incorporated—it will resemble sand with a few tiny peas in the mix when it's well mixed.

Now, add the ice cold water (no cubes, so maybe use a strainer if needed) to the flour and butter mixture. Use a silicone spatula and/or your hands to form a ball of dough.

Lightly dust a chilled work surface—remember our chilling tips for countertop—and quickly form the dough into a square roughly 2"-thick. Wrap it in a 24"-ish long piece of plastic wrap and refrigerate for 15 minutes.

Keep in mind, if you are new to working with puff pastry, plastic wrap is very helpful for reducing stickiness when rolling and easily shaping dough as you work. If you have a silicone baking mat, you can also use this between the plastic wrap and the countertop to minimize slipping as you roll out the dough.

Now, as the dough chills, let's make a butter packet.

Note that it's helpful to use blocks of plant-based butter to start. You must use a dairy-free butter that is solid when chilled, not the "spreadable" kind. 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.

Lay out a 24"-ish long piece of plastic wrap. Dust the center with some flour and place the solid, cold butter on top of the flour-dusted plastic wrap. Dust the top of the butter with more flour and then lay another 24"-ish long piece of plastic wrap on top of the flour-dusted butter. Use a rolling pin to pound the butter down and roll out to about ¼" thickness. Remove the top piece of plastic wrap. Visually divide the rolled-out butter into thirds, we'll fold it up like a letter. Fold one exterior third over the center third. Then fold the remaining exterior third over the center third. Dust the top of the butter with a little flour again, cover with plastic wrap and pound down and roll out again. Fold like a letter again, use hands to shape into a roughly 5" x 5" block, wrap entirely in plastic wrap and place in the fridge to chill for 15–20 minutes.

Be sure to save the plastic wrap for shaping as you move forward.

Incorporate the chilled butter packet into the chilled dough.

There are two ways that you can do this, by rolling the dough out into a large plus shape, or rolling out a large square and folding like a diamond which many find easiest. With either method, you want to make sure that you have plenty of rolled-out dough to completely cover and encase the butter packet. If you don't secure the butter packet entirely within the dough, you may have leakage when you bake your pastry.

First, you will have to roll out your pastry.

For the plus-shape method, lay one sheet of plastic wrap down horizontally, then lay another down perpendicularly and in the center of the horizontal sheet so you have a “plus” of plastic wrap. Place the chilled dough into the center intersection of the two pieces of plastic wrap. Fold the wrap over and roll the dough out into a plus shape with a center that’s at least 6” x 6”.

Now, place the chilled butter packet into the center of the dough and fold the “arms” of the plus sign over the butter packet tightly, using the plastic wrap to help you do so without tears or cracks. Make sure that the dough overlaps and encases the butter packet completely. Use your hands and the plastic wrap if needed to press into a square.

For the diamond method, use two sheets of plastic wrap to create a non-stick, square surface and roll out the dough into a large 18–20” square. Rotate the square so it’s a diamond and place the butter packet square in the center of the diamond. Fold the dough tightly over the packet, using the plastic wrap to help you do so without breaking or creating cracks. Use your hands and the plastic wrap if needed to press into a square.

You can wrap and chill the dough for 15 minutes at this point, or move on to laminating the dough with the first turn now...

Laminate the dough by making turns.

Once the butter packet is wrapped by the dough, it’s time to begin the lamination process with the “first turn.”

One turn is comprised of the following two steps:

1.) Roll the dough out into a roughly 5” x 12” rectangle, using the plastic wrap to help if needed, and then fold the dough over itself using a letter-fold or book-fold technique. Then, 2.) rotate/turn the folded dough 90 degrees, roll it out again, fold it over itself again, and chill for 1-2 hours.

That’s one turn completed.

With this first turn, a “letter fold” gives you nine layers of fat and a “book fold” gives you sixteen layers of fat. Try both methods to discover what works best for your needs and comfort level—both work well.

You’ll ultimately repeat as many turns as you need to create as many layers as you need, always chilling thoroughly 1–2 hours between each turn. The more turns you make, the more layers you’ll have in your dough. A good rule of thumb is 4–6 turns for flaky puff pastry, chilling for 1–2 hours between each turn.

When turns are complete and the dough has chilled after the last turn for 1–2 hours, you can roll out, shape, fill, and bake as your recipe directs. Or, you can wrap tightly and place in the fridge or freezer for future use.

A few more tips:

It’s very important to respect the resting and chilling times between turns in puff pastry recipes. No cutting corners. The fat absolutely must be solid and cold when it goes into a hot oven if you want a layered, flaky result.

Temperature is also key when working with chilled pastry dough. Know that the sweet spot for dough roll-ability and fold-ability is between cracking (too cold) and too soft (butter is melting). It takes practice and attention, but if you’re diligent about keeping the fat in the dough cold, it will all turn out ok. You can perfect your technique and relationship with this process with each turn of puff pastry dough. With each batch you’ll become more familiar with the nuance and technique that builds confidence.

It’s very helpful when making your turns to use a dusting of flour over the rolled-out dough. It minimizes stickiness which is very helpful when using a rolling pin. It’s also helpful to dust the rolling pin to minimize stickiness. You can sprinkle flour on the dough and rub excess off with hands or a little pastry brush. You just want enough of a dusting that it isn’t sticky anymore—you don’t want to add too much flour to the dough. Just enough to define layers and minimize stickiness.

You can also use the plastic wrap as a barrier between the rolling pin and the dough as you roll.

Plastic wrap can help create perfect rectangles with straight edges (French-patisserie style) or you can work with slightly rounded edges (home-cook-pot-pie style). This is baker's choice. If you use plastic wrap to help you roll out dough, place a silicone baking mat under the plastic to minimize and slipping when rolling the dough.

You can also skip using plastic wrap altogether and roll out on a dusted countertop. A bench scraper can be helpful as you work this way, helping to separate dough from the counter without tearing or breaking so you can move it or dust underneath with a little flour.

Ok, let's make some puff pastry!