

# Tarte Tatin Au Naturel



Robert Bateman, iconic wildlife artist and 2010 Springsong Guest Birder, lives with his wife Birgit amid an old Saltspring Island orchard of Cox and Pippin apples. He has often painted cardinals and towhees feasting on the winter fruit that hangs from the branches outside his studio window. Robert's book on his environmental art—*Hope & Wild Apples: Making Choices for a Life in Nature*—plus his love of pie and Birgit's commitment to a diet free of refined sugars, led to the development of this recipe by Merilyn Simonds in his honour. It is a variation on the signature dessert served at the Hotel Tatin south of Paris by sisters Stéphanie and Caroline Tatin, who accidentally invented the inverted pie in the 1880s. It is unknown which baking apple they used, but the Northern Spy, which originated in East Bloomfield, New York, around 1800, produces a perfect, international Tarte Tatin.

## INGREDIENTS

**4 CUPS** pure unsweetened apple cider reduced to ½ CUP

**7 TO 8** medium-large Northern Spy apples, roughly 3 LBS

**JUICE** of half a lemon

**4 TBSP** unsalted butter, cubed, very cold (or a mild-flavoured oil)

Butter pie crust or 1 sheet of defrosted (vegan) puff pastry

**MAKES ONE 9-INCH TARTE**

## METHOD

Heat cider in a large-diameter sauce pan to boiling. Reduce to ½ cup, watching carefully towards the end to avoid scorching or reducing too far.

Pare apples, cut in thirds or quarters, and remove cores. Pieces need not be uniform. Place in a bowl and toss gently in lemon juice to keep from browning.

Preheat oven to 400°F. You will need two skillets: a very large one to cook the apples and a smaller 9-inch skillet or pie pan for baking.

In a large skillet, heat ½ cup reduced cider until it caramelizes and turns amber. Put dabs on a white plate to test colour and remove from heat before scorching.

Immediately add butter (keep in refrigerator until needed). Whisk to mix thoroughly.

Return to medium heat and add apples, tossing gently to coat thoroughly in the caramel. Cook for about 10 minutes, turning periodically, until the edges are translucent and a toothpick can penetrate with a bit of resistance. (Three quarters of the cooking is done stove-top; the rest in the oven.)

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Using tongs, arrange the cooked apple pieces tightly in a circle in the smaller skillet, overlapping the pieces by at least a third. Crowd them in, leaning each piece onto the one behind it, so that even after they shrink in the oven, they'll still be tightly snugged together. Fill the centre of the circle with remaining pieces. (You may not use them all.)

Scrape the large skillet and pour any remaining caramel over the apples.

While the apples cool a little, make the pastry. Coarsely grate a half cup of cold butter into a cup of flour and mix with the hands until the size of small peas. Fork in a quarter cup cold water. Shape into a ball, handling as little as possible. Roll out to a 10-inch circle.

Lay the pastry over the apples. Tuck the edges inside the rim of the skillet and flute. Slit 2-3 vents in the pastry.

Set the tarte tatin skillet on a baking tray and place in the oven. Bake for 25-30 minutes, until the crust is golden brown and apple juices are bubbling up through the vents.

Remove from oven. Run a butter knife around the outside edge of the tarte. Allow to rest at least 30 minutes. An hour is not too long: wait until the apples have set in their shape and the caramel and apple juices have a chance to cool and thicken. If the tarte is flipped too soon, the apples will sag and the juices run off in a puddle.

To flip, place a plate over the skillet, and holding the plate to the skillet, invert the whole thing quickly. Give the tarte a few minutes to drop onto the plate and settle, then lift off the skillet. If any apples stick to the pan, loosen them and replace them gently in the tarte.

Voilà! A perfect refined-sugar-free tarte tatin.

Serve alone, slightly warm, or with whipped cream, ice cream, or crème fraîche. The tarte keeps well overnight in the refrigerator; warm gently in the oven before serving.

