

Travel Tales

Bringing Pies to the Pieless: The Quest for Montgomery Pie

by

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Most people in Montgomery County have never heard of Montgomery Pie. And that is a darn shame, since it is probably the best pie ever made. Stick around and I'll tell you all about it, how to make it, and where to buy it.



A stack of Montgomery Pies, ready to eat

According to the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, Montgomery Pie originated in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, west of Philadelphia. That county, like ours, was named for General Richard Montgomery, a hero of the American Revolution. He was born in Ireland in 1738, fought as lieutenant in the British Army in the French and Indian War, and was commissioned a brigadier general in the fledgling, revolutionary U.S. Army. He led an invasion of Canada and captured Montreal, then laid siege to Quebec. But sadly General Montgomery was killed there by cannon fire on December 31, 1775. The pie that bears his name probably was first made by the Mennonites or Amish, as a variation on shoo-fly pie, which is similar, more famous, but not nearly as good.

Making Montgomery Pie is not all that easy, because there are many variations on the recipe, and there are two distinct layers (in addition to the crust) which must be kept separate. The secret recipe used by the famous Brown's Orchards and Farm Markets, never before released to the public, is as follows:

For the bottom layer: Mix together well the following: 1.5 cups of Golden Barrel Table Syrup, 1.5 cups of sugar, three eggs, three cups of water, six tablespoons of flour, 0.5 cup of lemon juice, and the zest of two small lemons. This layer will be gooey and will taste more of lemon, with very little molasses flavor (unlike shoo-fly pie, which tastes strongly of molasses).

For the top layer: Cream together the following, thoroughly and until light and fluffy: one egg, one egg yolk, 1.5 cups of sugar, 0.75 cup of margarine. Then add in 2 cups of flour, 1.5 teaspoons of baking powder, and 0.75 cups of whole milk, and beat on high in a Kitchenaid or similar mixer until very smooth. When baked this layer will be cakey, with a chewy top.

Next, pour a cup of the bottom layer mixture into each of three unbaked nine-inch pie crusts. Then take a four ounce scoop, and put three scoops of top layer mixture on top of the bottom layer, in each pie (thus nine scoops in all). Do not bother to smooth out the top layer balls – these will collapse and smooth out by themselves in the oven. Bake at 370 degrees for 40-45 minutes, until the top is golden brown and the bottom is not too gooey.

Sound like too much work? OK, then follow this recipe:

Get in your car. Drive north to the Baltimore Beltway, go around the BB to the west, then head due north on I-83 to Brown's Orchards and Farm Markets, at 8892 Susquehanna Trail South, on the south side of Loganville, Pennsylvania, in York County, about seven miles north of the Maryland/Pennsylvania border. It will take about 80 minutes to get there. Arrive any day of the week. Call ahead to 717-428-2036 to check their hours and ensure they have not sold out of the Montgomery Pies for the day. (You can reserve a pie for pickup.) Buy all the MPs you can afford – only \$5.95 for a small and \$8.95 for a large pie. Flee town before the alarm is raised by locals who want those pies.

Still too much work? OK, try this classic modern recipe: Pick up your phone. Call Brown's and ask for the bakery shipping department. Order as many MPs as you can. Wait 24 hours. Answer doorbell. Eat.

Pies will be shipped out unfrozen. Once you receive them, you can freeze some to preserve them for later, if you have that much discipline. Unfrozen, pies will last up to four days, unless they are eaten in minutes.

Brown's makes the best Montgomery Pies we have found anywhere. They are made from scratch on the premises. Barbara McFtridge, the Bakery Manager at Brown's, says that "Making the top layer can be a bit tricky. Be sure that the sugar, margarine and eggs are well creamed together – mix them for about 2-3 minutes. And the bottom layer should also be mixed well, for about three minutes, but not over-mixed." She notes, "About thirty percent of the bakery's customers come up from Maryland, but most have not heard of Montgomery Pie, and often ask what it is." The bakery's mission is to bring pies to the pie-less, and they do a great job.

According to Stan Brown, the owner/manager and son of the founder, the business started in 1948 as a roadside farm stand, and eventually evolved into a full service market with a coffee bar serving sandwiches and Paninis, and with a large selection of vegetables, fruits, honeys, candies, sauces and other farm products. Most of the fruits and vegetables are grown on the Brown family's own 48-acre farm, just behind the large market building. The Browns have a large picnic pavilion beside the market, and on week-ends present family-oriented events such as theater groups, concerts, karate demonstrations and fudge contests. (See www.brownsorchards.com.)

OK, OK, so you want to know what Montgomery Pie tastes like. Well, it hard to describe. It is lemony, sweet but a little tart, a little chewy, with a delightful flavor that is totally unforgettable. Sort of like Montgomery County, Maryland!



Stan Brown of Brown's Orchards in Pennsylvania, with his famous Montgomery Pie



Montgomery Pie and beautiful countryside: a great combination

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Lew and his wife Susan Toulmin have eaten pie in almost every state in the Union. They live in Silver Spring.

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