Curried Leek Tart Tatin

CURRIED LEEK TART TATIN

Tatin de poireaux au curry

SERVES 4

Beyond the original apple tart, baked upside down with the fruit at the bottom and the dough on top, the *tarte tatin* format can be applied to all manner of fillings, sweet or savory, and it is most flattering to vegetables that might otherwise dry out in the oven. This makes it well suited to leeks, which fare best in a moist environment, and are encouraged to soften under the protective mantle of the tart crust. The leek segments also look quite pretty, sitting upright in concentric circles, once the tart is flipped crust-side down.

I cook the leeks in a skillet first, to initiate the browning, and season them with curry powder, which is a perfect complement to their natural sweetness. I use a very flavorful curry powder called Kari Gosse, developed by a Breton apothecary in the early nineteenth century, when ships from the Far East still docked in local ports to unload their treasured spices. Use whichever curry powder you like, as long as it tastes fresh and not dusty.

3 pounds / 1.4 kg leeks, trimmed
1 tablespoon olive oil for cooking, plus more for the pan
½ teaspoon fine sea salt
1 teaspoon curry powder
5 ounces / 140 g fresh goat cheese, cold from the fridge, cut into thin slices
Freshly ground black pepper
Yogurt Tart Dough
½ cup / 20 g finely chopped fresh chives

1. Slice the leek whites into ¾-inch / 2 cm lengths. Put them in a bowl of cold water and swoosh them around gently to remove any sand or dirt, but keep the sections whole. Drain well.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the leeks, placing them cut-sides down and in a single layer. Sprinkle with the salt and curry powder, cover, and reduce the heat to medium-low. Cook for 10 minutes without disturbing, checking regularly that the leeks don't brown too much underneath; reduce the heat if they do. Let cool to room temperature.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°F. / 175°C.
4. Grease a 10-inch / 25 cm cake or tart pan with olive oil and arrange the leeks browned side up (the other side will brown while the tart bakes) in the pan in a single, tightly packed layer, leaving a ¾-inch / 2 cm margin all around. Top evenly with the goat cheese and sprinkle with pepper.
5. Roll out the dough between two sheets of parchment paper into a 12-inch / 30 cm round. Remove the top sheet of paper and, placing your hand underneath the dough, flip it onto the pan so it lands more or less centered over the ingredients; adjust if necessary. Remove the parchment paper, tuck the dough into the pan around the leeks, and pierce 3 to 4 holes in the top of the dough to make steam vents.
6. Bake until golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes. Run a knife around the crust to loosen and, holding the pan with oven mitts, invert it onto a serving plate. Any piece of leek that remains stuck to the pan can be placed back on the tart where it belongs.
7. Sprinkle with pepper and chives and serve.

LEEKS

Pick firm leeks that are on the thinner side, with as long a white part as possible and an outer layer that feels smooth and fresh, rather than parched or wrinkled. Check the color of the leaves; they should be a vibrant emerald green with no discoloration.

Because leeks are grown in sandy soil, they can hoard sand and dirt between their layers, so you should clean them carefully.

YOGURT TART DOUGH

Pâte à tarte au yaourt

MAKES ENOUGH FOR ONE 11-INCH / 28 CM TART

Using a mix of yogurt and butter produces a particularly crisp and flaky crust that makes vegetable tarts feel as rewarding as dessert. It can be made with just all-purpose flour, but sometimes I like to use some buckwheat flour for a malty variation.

1½ cups / 195 g all-purpose flour
½ cup plus 1 tablespoon / 130 g plain all-natural yogurt (not nonfat) or silken tofu
5 tablespoons / 65 g cold high-quality unsalted butter, diced, or ⅓ cup / 80 ml olive oil
½ teaspoon fine sea salt

1. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour to remove any lumps. Form a well in the center and spoon in the yogurt. Add the butter and salt and use a pastry blender, a sturdy fork, or the tips of your fingers to rub the yogurt and butter into the flour. (Alternatively, mix the dough in short pulses in a food processor.)
2. When most of the flour is incorporated and you can no longer see pieces of butter in the dough, turn out onto a clean work surface and knead the dough lightly until it comes together into a ball. Add a little flour or a few drops of water to reach a workable consistency. Flatten it into a thick disk or square, to match the shape of the tart you plan to make. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes or overnight (return to just below room temperature before using).

Buckwheat Variation Use 1 cup / 130 g all-purpose flour plus ½ cup / 65 g buckwheat flour.