Apple Cider Tart with Caramelized Nuts

This is a stunning fall tart, festive and homey all at once. It is topped with apples, infused with lemony cider, and crowned with deeply caramelized seeds and nuts. The filling is inspired by a recipe in one of my first German whole-grain cookbooks, *Das Grosse Buch der Vollwertküche*. The tart makes for a light yet refined dessert, perfect for the food-heavy holidays.

As sophisticated as it might look, it is not hard to prepare. You can work in steps if your schedule is packed (see Baker's Notes). If you like, add a scoop of vanilla ice cream on top, or serve with Cream with Honey and Rum (page 265). Honeyed Yogurt Kefir (page 265) makes leftovers sing.

BAKING TIME 20 to 25 minutes
MAKES 1 (9-inch / 23 cm) tart to serve 8

1 lemon, preferably organic
3 or 4 baking apples, see Baker's Notes
180 g (¾ cup) hard or nonalcoholic apple cider or apple juice
1 small bay leaf, broken in half
50 g (scant ½ cup) coarsely chopped hazelnuts
50 g (generous ⅓ cup) sunflower seeds
40 g (2 tablespoons) honey
25 g (2 tablespoons) unsalted butter, in a few pieces
1 parbaked Honey Hazelnut Tart or Pie Shell (page 247)
1 tablespoon melted and cooled unsalted butter, for brushing
Hot water, as needed
Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1 Heat the oven to 375°F (190°C) with a rack in the center.

2 Remove two strips (2 × ½ inch / 5 × 1.25 cm) of zest from the lemon, omitting any pith. Squeeze the lemon and pour the juice into a shallow medium bowl. As you prepare the apples, add them to the bowl and occasionally give the pieces a gentle toss to avoid browning.

For a tart pan: Core two skin-on apples and cut into quarters. Core and peel a third apple and cut into quarters as well (you will need 9 to 12 quarters, depending on size). Very thinly slice each quarter lengthwise, eight to ten times, but do not cut all the way through—this allows the apples to fan out during baking. Even if your cuts are less than perfect, it will still look beautiful. Core then slice a fourth apple in half crosswise. Peel the top half and make a cross-hatch pattern across, again not slicing all the way through—it will be used in the center of the tart (you can eat the bottom half).

For a pie pan: Core and peel one apple. Core and slice the second apple in half, through the stem end, and peel only one-half of it. Core a third apple but do not peel it. Cut the three apples into quarters—you should now have six peeled and six skin-on. Very thinly slice each quarter lengthwise, eight to ten times, but do not cut all the way through—this allows the apples to fan out during baking. Even if your cuts are less than perfect, it will still look beautiful.

3 Have a plate and a slotted spoon on hand near the stove, as well as a heatproof spatula and a small bowl. Pour the cider into a large heavy-bottom or nonstick skillet (do not use cast-iron with acidic liquids) that fits the apple pieces snugly. Add the zest and the bay leaf pieces, and place the prepared apple pieces into the pan, side by side in a circle, cored-side down, with the half in the center. Bring the cider to a lively simmer over medium-high heat. Adjust the heat to maintain the simmer and cook, uncovered and watching closely, until the apples just start to soften and lose their raw crispness (insert the tip of a



paring knife into the side of a quarter to test), 2 to 4 minutes. The fruits will continue to soften further in the oven.

4 Remove the skillet from the heat and, using the slotted spoon, carefully transfer the apples to the plate so they remain intact; set aside. Return the pan to the heat and continue cooking the cider at a lively simmer until the liquid thickens and is reduced to a glaze, 2 to 5 more minutes. Remove the zest and the bay leaf and immediately scrape the glaze into a small bowl. You should have 15 to 30 g (1 to 2 tablespoons); set aside.

5 When ready to bake, combine the nuts and seeds, honey, and the 25 g (2 tablespoons) butter pieces in the now empty skillet. Warm over medium to medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, just until the nut mixture is bubbly and emits a lightly toasty scent, 2 to 4 minutes (it will caramelize in the oven). Off the heat, scrape the nut mixture to one side into a heap (so it doesn't cook further); set aside.

6 **In a tart pan:** Place 9 to 12 apple quarters, depending on size, in a circle along the edge of the parbaked tart shell, alternating skin-on and peeled apples as desired. Set the cross-hatched apple half into the center.

In a pie pan: Alternate peeled and skin-on quarters in a circle and place one or two of the remaining quarters into the center of the parbaked tart shell.

7 Use a soup spoon to spread the nut mixture—it is hot—all around the rim of the pan and in between the apples. Brush the apples and the rim of the crust with the melted butter. Set the pan on a rimless baking sheet for easier handling and carefully transfer to the oven (it can slide!).

8 **Bake** until the nut mixture has caramelized and is deep golden brown and the rim of the crust turns deep golden brown as well, 20 to 25 minutes, rotating the pan halfway. The crust should come off the sides when gently prodded. Carefully remove and transfer the pan to a wire rack. Depending on the consistency of your cider glaze, stir in 1 or 2 teaspoons of hot water to loosen, and brush it across the apples while still warm.

9 Allow to cool for about 15 minutes and serve warm, or set aside until completely cool, about 2 hours. After about 1 hour, place a microwave cover on top to prevent the fruit from drying out.

10 When ready to serve, unmold the tart (see page 127) and dust with confectioners' sugar. Cut into eight pieces, using a long, serrated knife, and serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or a dollop of cream of your choice.

Baker's Notes

You will need about 575 g (1¼ lb) small to medium apples (four for a fluted tart pan; three for a pie pan). Still, have a couple extra on hand, just in case you are not happy with your slicing, or the skin is blemished. Good baking apples include Golden Delicious, Pink Lady, Fuji, and Jonagold. If using Honeycrisp, I recommend peeling the skin, as it turns dull during baking.

I cherish the toothsomeness of skin-on apples, although they are a little harder to cut through using a fork. Some of my testers preferred to peel all apples.

Hard cider with about 5 percent alcohol adds complexity (see page 278).

MAKE AHEAD Partially bake the crust from the freezer (see page 248) while you prep the ingredients for the filling, including the apples (**step 2**). While the crust is cooling, cook the apples and prepare the nut mixture (**steps 3, 4, and 5**).

The whole tart can be baked up to 8 hours ahead. The apples and the glaze (**steps 3 and 4**) can be parcooked 1 day ahead. Allow to cool, carefully transfer the apples to a lidded container, and refrigerate; seal the bowl with the glaze with plastic wrap and chill as well.

STORE The tart tastes best on the day of baking. Keep leftovers for 1 day at cool room temperature in a sealed container, up to 2 days in the refrigerator.

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