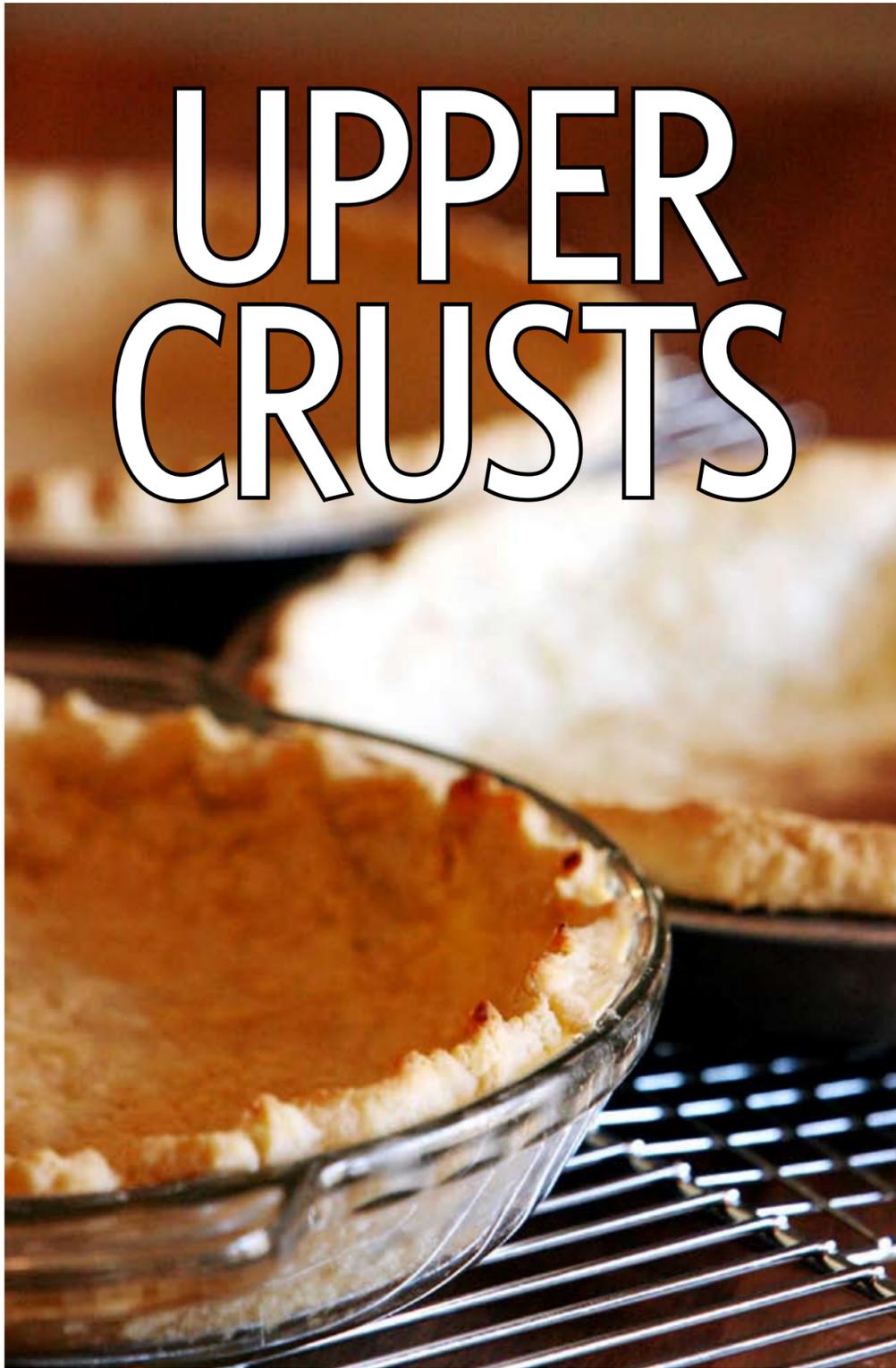




You know that can of pumpkin in your pantry? It can make a lot of stuff. **D3**



UPPER CRUSTS

Some prefer the ease of store-bought crusts or mixes, but many others prefer the richness of homemade.
Photos by JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

Tasters put pie shells to the test

BY NATALIE MIKLES WORLD SCENE WRITER

Maybe you wouldn't imagine something as innocuous as pie crust could spur a heated debate. Well, it can.

Those who believe in the art of pie dough — who keep their butter and shortening in the freezer, use marble slabs to roll the dough and can speak to a preference of French vs. American rolling pins — will stand nothing less than homemade.

But others, many others, are just fine with a frozen Mrs. Smith's shell or the red box of Pillsbury pre-rolled dough.

So we decided to put them to a test, to see if anyone would know the difference between the homemade crust and the store-bought, as well as which was preferred. At first we thought it might not be much of a test at all. Most everyone claims to love homemade pie crust, so surely it would win. But what if, we thought, one of those mixes, boxes or frozen crusts was found to be even better?

Our testers, very willing Tulsa World staffers, analyzed the taste and texture of homemade, frozen, pre-rolled refrigerated and dry-mix varieties — all filled with cherry pie filling. Of course, they didn't know which was which.

Here's what we found.

Natalie Mikles 581-8486
natalie.mikles@tulsaworld.com

☑ THE WINNER



Jiffy pie crust mix
65 cents, which makes two crusts

We never would have guessed this less-than-\$1 a box mix would be so well liked.

"Light, flaky, crispy," one tester said. "Easily the best all around."

But it wasn't a unanimous win. Some thought it was too dry, and one said "a bit stale — tastes like a box mix."

Once the taste test was over and we told the testers they preferred Jiffy, most were surprised. Some didn't know Jiffy made anything other than cornbread.

Pros: This crust took only a few minutes to make. All you do is add a few tablespoons of water, stir and then roll it out into a circle. Plus, doing those few steps makes you feel like you've baked from scratch.

Cons: Makes a crispy crust, which depending on your preference, can be good or bad. One tester said it reminded him of shortbread.

SECOND PLACE



Homemade

Those who preferred the homemade crust really liked the "buttery," "rich," "near perfect" taste. We tested using a Martha Stewart recipe for pate brisee — a basic all-butter crust. But not everyone liked it, with some saying it was "too dense" and "doughy."

Pros: Sometimes just knowing it's homemade makes the crust taste better. And if you like butter, no crust is as buttery or fresh as homemade.

Cons: Much more time consuming than the other three crusts we tested. And, if you don't have a rolling pin, counter space or a board to roll out your dough, you're in for a mess.

THIRD

It was a tie between refrigerated prerolled and frozen.



Pillsbury refrigerated pie crusts

\$3.49 for two crusts

After we revealed the winners, a couple of testers weren't at all surprised to find they preferred this crust since it was the one they use at home. "Traditional and sweet," one said. "Most like homemade."

Pros: Unroll, place in a pie pan and you're done. Having a sheet of dough makes it easy if you want to create lattice or cut-outs for your top crust.

Cons: Some testers thought this crust was "too chewy," "tough," and "chemical tasting."



Mrs. Smith's frozen pie shells

\$3.29 for two crusts

One tester, who has spent her fair share of time making pies for Thanksgiving dinner, was shocked to learn the frozen crust was her favorite. It made her wonder why she has spent so much time making pie crusts when this one is "just as good as homemade."

Pros: The easiest of them all. The most difficult thing about this crust is opening the package. No dishes to clean. When you're finished, just throw the pan away.

Cons: If the aluminum pie pan it comes in doesn't give it away as store-bought, the perfectly scalloped edge will.