



Recipe 11.20.2023

Caramel Apples Under a Cheddar Roof

6 Servings



If you've never made a caramel before, or if you've tried and failed, you're in luck. The method I use—which I learned from reading author Shirley Corriher's brilliant work—requires no wet pastry brush for brushing down the pot or any other fussy tricks. Introducing either an acidic ingredient (in this case lemon juice, but cream of tartar also works) or a liquid form of sugar (honey, corn syrup, etc), will ensure the sugar crystals stay fluid as the syrup heats, guaranteeing the caramel will darken as the temperature rises.

For the Crust

180 g (1 ½ cups) all-purpose flour, plus more for surface

6 g (2 tsp.) sugar

3 g (1 tsp.) kosher salt

¾ cup (1½ sticks) chilled unsalted butter

4 oz. chilled sharp cheddar, coarsely grated

For the Caramel and Assembly

5 large honeycrisp apples (about 2 ½ pounds), peeled, cut into sixths

336 g (1 ¾ cups) sugar, plus more for sprinkling

1 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice

1 tsp. kosher salt

¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter

2 tsp. vanilla extract

2 Tbsp. heavy cream or milk

Flaky salt, for sprinkling

Ice cream, whipped cream, or cold heavy cream, for serving

Make the Crust

Fill a 1-cup measuring cup with ice water; set aside. In a medium bowl, toss together the flour, sugar, salt, and cheddar. Cut the butter into tablespoon-sized pieces and add to the flour mixture; toss to coat the butter with flour. Dump the mixture onto a clean work surface. Use the heel of your dominant hand to press down and flatten the butter into ¼-inch thick pieces. Use a bench scraper or spatula to scrape the mixture off the work surface as needed.

Once the butter pieces have all been flattened, use the bench scraper to toss the mixture together, then use your hands to spread it out to about a 12-inch round. Drizzle ¼ cup ice water over the mixture, then use the bench scraper and one hand to toss everything together until the water has been evenly dispersed and absorbed (the mixture will still be very dry and crumbly, and some of the butter pieces will clump into balls).

Scoot the mixture into a tidy mountain. Working from the outside edge of the dough pile, use the heel of your hand to smash and smear approximately ¼ cup amounts of the butter-flour mixture together, pressing the dough down and away from you as you go. Scrape the mixture off the surface again, reset the mountain, and repeat this smashing-smearing motion. This French pastry-making technique, called *fraisage*, kneads and blends the flour and butter together without overworking the dough. The objective is to force the butter and flour into a deeply fused union while also keeping the butter in flat sheets. Gather, scoot, and smear a third time, at which point the dough should look pale yellow and mostly combined, and it should hold together when you squeeze some in your hand. Use the scraper to corral everything

into an 8-inch round, then use your hands to firmly press and pat the dough into a cohesive, 1-inch thick disc. Wrap dough tightly in plastic and chill while you prepare caramel.

Make the Caramel Apple Mixture

Preheat oven to 375°F. Place a small white plate and a spoon next to the stovetop. Combine 1 ¾ cups sugar, lemon juice, and ¼ cup water in an 8-inch cast iron skillet; stir thoroughly with a heatproof spatula to completely saturate sugar. Place over medium-low heat and cook, stirring frequently, until sugar is completely dissolved, liquid is clear, and syrup is approaching a simmer, 5-6 minutes. Do not rush this step! If there are undissolved sugar crystals in the mixture before you continue, the syrup may become foamy and seize up, never changing color regardless of how long you cook it for, which is the culinary equivalent of one of those nightmares where you're running up the stairs you never actually get anywhere, and you'll have to start over. Lower the heat if needed.

Once the mixture is simmering, cook, swirling pan infrequently but no longer stirring, until syrup turns the color of hay, 7 minutes more. (Because the surface of the pan is dark, spoon a bit of syrup onto the white plate to check the color throughout this process.) Continue to cook, watching and checking as caramel quickly becomes auburn and a couple wisps of smoke appear, 2-3 minutes more. When caramel is deep mahogany and smells faintly of molasses, 2 minutes more, remove from heat and carefully add butter, stirring with heat-proof spatula to combine. (This entire journey should take about 20-22 minutes.) Caramel is no joke, people: It's molten hot, and it will bubble violently when the butter is added, so take care. Stir in vanilla and 1 tsp. salt.

Add apple wedges to caramel and stir to coat. Cook over medium heat, stirring gently occasionally, until caramel is foaming energetically, looks less thick than it was before, and apples are slightly softened, about 4 minutes. Turn off heat and let mixture settle for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, remove dough from the refrigerator, unwrap, and cut into quarters. Let sit 5 minutes to take off the chill (or up to 10, if dough has been refrigerated overnight). Stack quarters on top of each other, then press down until the dough is about 2 inches thick. Again using the heel of your hand, smash and cleave off pieces of dough into fat irregular ribbons. It's okay if they're thicker on one side than on the other.

Place cast-iron skillet onto lined rimmed baking sheet. Shingle dough over apples. Brush with cream and sprinkle with sugar and some flaky salt. Transfer to oven and cook until crust is golden brown all over and caramel is bubbling around edge, 45–55 minutes. Let sit at least 45 minutes before spooning into the dessert. Serve with ice cream, whipped cream, or a drizzle of cold cream.

From the Market	At Home
<p>Sharp cheddar</p> <p>Honeycrisp apples</p> <p>Heavy cream</p> <p>Ice cream</p>	<p>All-purpose flour</p> <p>Sugar</p> <p>Salt</p> <p>Butter</p> <p>Lemon</p> <p>Vanilla extract</p> <p>Flaky salt</p>
Spin It	Spin It
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omit cheddar cheese • Granny Smith, Pink Lady, or Braeburn apples can replace Honeycrisp • Serve with sour cream instead of ice cream or whipped cream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub cream of tartar, honey or corn syrup for lemon to prevent crystallization