Coconut Cream Pies with Whipped Cream and Store-bought Crusts

Our Uncle Gil makes the best coconut cream pies which are a must-have at every large family gathering. He has not yet officially passed down the recipe, but this is my attempt and it's close.

This recipe is easy but it takes a full 4 hours for the pies to set. Don't rush it or you'll make coconut soup.

- Two traditional 9" frozen pie crusts in tins
- 1 cup white granulated sugar
- 1/3 cup corn starch
- 4 large egg yolks
- 3 cups whole milk, cold
- 1/4 cup of butter (4 tbsp), cold, Land O' Lakes or similar
- 2 teaspoons good vanilla extract
- Pinch salt
- 2 cups of sweetened flaked coconut, like Baker's Angel Flake
- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- Powdered sugar, 6 tablespoons

While you're preheating the oven to 400 degrees F, take the frozen crusts out of the freezer, separate them and let them thaw out slightly on the counter.

When the oven is hot, prick the bottom of the pie crusts all over with a fork. Set on a middle rack in the oven for 15 minutes until golden brown around the edges.

While the pie crusts are baking, make the custard:

Whisk together the sugar and corn starch in a bowl. Dump into a large saucepan on the stove.

In a separate bowl, separate the egg yolks and whisk them together with 3 cups of cold whole milk.

Turn the saucepan onto medium high heat.

Slowly whisk the egg and milk mixture into the sugar and corn starch on the stovetop.

Whisk continuously for about 8 minutes. At first, the mixture will look like a glossy golden liquid with a lot of froth and foam. Keep whisking. Around the 8 minute mark, the frothy liquid should quickly turn into a thick pudding consistency. If it's not coming together, turn up the heat slightly and keep whisking but be careful not to let it come to a true boil.

The custard is only going to thicken a little bit more as it sets. Taste a bit. Make sure it sticks and doesn't run off your spoon. It should be nice and thick and gloopy.

Pull the custard off the heat.

At this point, your pie crusts should be done baking. Pull them out of the oven and set them on a wire rack to cool. Then finish making your custard filling:

Cut the cold butter into tablespoon size pats and use a spatula to fold each pat of butter into the custard one at a time until it melts and incorporates.

Add two teaspoons of vanilla and a pinch of salt to taste.

Measure out slightly less than 2 full cups of sweetened flaked coconut. Reserve about 1/4 cup to toast for the topping. Dump the rest of the coconut into the custard and stir to combine.

You should have slightly more than two heaping cups of filling for each pie crust. Scoop the custard into the crusts and use your spatula to distribute.

Cover each pie with plastic wrap, pressing the cling wrap close to the surface of the custard to prevent a film from forming on the top as the pie sets.

Let the pies cool for ~20 minutes on the counter to room temperature. Then move them into the fridge to set for 4 hours.

Put a big metal bowl with your electric mixer attachments in the freezer. We'll use these to make whipped cream later.

Toast some coconut:

Preheat your oven to 350 F. Lay parchment on a baking sheet.

Spread the remaining sweetened flaked coconut out on the parchment paper.

Bake in the oven, watching closely and turning half way for about 6 minutes. You're looking for a nice mahogany brown toast along the edges. Take the toasted coconut out, give it a stir and let it cool.

When you're ready to finish your pies:

Pour two cups of heavy whipping cream (a whole pint) into your chilled metal bowl. Using an electric mixer, whisk the cream on high speed. Sprinkle the powdered sugar over the cream while it's mixing to help stabilize the whipped cream. Keep whisking until you get nice thick, sturdy peaks but not for so long that the cream separates or turns into butter.

Dollop the whipped cream on top of your chilled fully set pies. Sprinkle toasted coconut on top.

Serve immediately. After the whipped cream is on the pies, it will keep stiff for about 12 hours before it falls apart.

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Optional: If you need to further stabilize the whipped cream so it can sit out longer and hold longer in the fridge:

Before you make the whipped cream, sprinkle one packet (2 oz) of plain gelatine into 3 tablespoons of cold water. Let this “bloom” and then melt it with a minute of heat on the stovetop (or a few seconds in the microwave if you have one). Splash a bit of the cold heavy whipping cream into the melted gelatin to cool it down. Pour the melted gelatin mixture into the whipped cream as you’re whipping it.