The Neo-Traditional Pecan Pie

Using old-fashioned, less-refined sweeteners, a baker adds flavor complexity to a Thanksgiving classic.

Of the three essential Thanksgiving pies—pumpkin, apple and pecan—pecan is the most polarizing. Some people look forward to it all year, while others find it way too sweet. But Cheryl Day of Savannah, Georgia’s Back in the Day Bakery makes a pecan pie to convert the naysayers. It tastes like dark caramel, toasted nuts and a little bit of bourbon—not just sweetness. Her fix: She doesn’t use the traditional light corn syrup. Instead, she turns to less-refined alternatives that used to be common in the South, like sorghum, sugarcane and dark corn. These syrups (and honey, too) transform pecan pie into a dessert of deep flavor complexity. Day’s recipe, on the next page, works with any one of them. —SARAH DIGREGORIO
## Bourbon-Pecan Pie

**Active 25 min; Total 1 hr 25 min plus 4 hr cooling**  
**Makes one 9-inch pie**

### PIECRUST

| 2 cups all-purpose flour | 1½ tsp. all-purpose flour |
| ¼ cup packed light brown sugar | ½ tsp. fine sea salt |
| ⅛ tsp. fine sea salt | 4 large eggs |
| 1 stick plus 7 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted and cooled | 1½ cups cane, sorghum or dark corn syrup, or honey |

### FILLING

| ½ cup granulated sugar | 2 Tbsp. bourbon |
| ¼ cup packed light brown sugar | 1½ Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted |
| 1½ tsp. pure vanilla extract | 1¾ cups unsalted pecan halves (½ lb.) |

### Step 1 Make the Pie Crust

1. In a bowl, whisk the flour with the brown sugar and salt. Stir in the butter until the dough comes together into a ball. Transfer the dough to a deep 9-inch glass or ceramic pie plate. Using your fingers, press the dough over the bottom and up the side of the plate to the rim. Crimp the edge with your fingers or a fork. Refrigerate for at least 20 minutes or up to 3 days.

### Step 2 Make the Filling

2. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°. In a bowl, whisk both sugars with the flour, salt and eggs until smooth, then mix in the syrup or honey. Add the bourbon, butter and vanilla and fold in the pecans.

3. Pour the filling into the chilled crust and transfer the pie to a foil-lined baking sheet. Cover loosely with foil and bake for 1 hour, until the filling is nearly set. Transfer the pie to a rack and let cool completely, about 4 hours, before serving.

**Wine**  

### The Alt Sweeteners

Old-fashioned sweeteners like the ones Day uses for her pecan pie are having a revival as bakers look beyond white sugar. The versions below offer not just sweetness but also complex flavor.

1. **SORGHUM SYRUP**  
   Made from sorghum-grass juice; fruity, tangy and almost leathery, with the highest ratio of overall flavor to pure sweetness.

2. **CANE SYRUP**  
   Made by boiling sugarcane juice in open kettles until it thickens and begins to taste a bit like caramel; has a long history in the South.

3. **DARK CORN SYRUP**  
   Has much more character than light corn syrup, evoking brown sugar, though it’s still relatively neutral in flavor compared to syrups like sorghum.

4. **HONEY**  
   Intensely floral as well as more sugary-sweet than the syrups above.