

The first thing I do is drop a stick of butter into a frying pan. The oven gets set to 375°. Then I toss the pan in the oven.

I could use a pie pan. For this recipe, in my humble opinion, cast iron gives a good crust on the edges. You'll see what I mean shortly. You will have to bear with me if any of this is counterintuitive. Pennsylvania Dutch cooking defies standard logic occasionally to achieve its deliciousness.

As the butter is melting in the warming oven, I grab the rest of the ingredients. A list I know by heart.

One cup each of flour and sugar. Two teaspoons of baking powder and a dash of salt. Mix in a bowl with around three-quarter cup of milk.

Then I open a can of peaches. No sugar added, of course.

When the oven reaches temperature and the butter melts, I take the pan out of the oven. Then the batter is poured over and into the melted butter. I arrange the canned peaches in a clockwork pattern atop the mixture.

Now it's time to toss the pan into the oven for forty minutes. Enough time to clean up and make myself a mug of tea. Then curl up someplace and let the hot mug warm my hands.

Kutchen was a Pennsylvania Dutch staple. In the old days, this simple recipe was usually prepared before bedtime. Served cold for breakfast. Canned rather than fresh fruit became part of the taste. Home preserves were what was available back then. The soft baked dough and canned fruit happen to pair with the crust formed by baking the dish in a pan full of butter. It became traditional.

I once made the mistake of using frozen peaches for a kutchen. My father was not a happy camper. Back to old-fashioned canned from then on.

Kutchen is not cobbler, crisp, or even slump. It is not even German Kuchen. Those other recipes are fine and dandy. The thing is, Pennsylvania Dutch kutchen is unique in ways that are hard to grasp until you sit down and have a slice.

I prefer to eat kutchen while it is fresh out of the oven. With the butter sizzling. Hot kutchen with a glass of cold milk is about as close to heaven as you can get in this life.

If I can't find canned peaches, fresh blueberries and lemon zest works well. Fresh cherries are also tasty, even if pitting the fruit is a chore. My mother said rhubarb was also a traditional choice. My grandfather was fond of pointing out that rhubarb is great for cleaning out your pipes.

Perchance, it would be wise to hold off on the rhubarb kutchen before a long drive.

Mom taught me how to make kutchen. It's in her recipe box, but she shared this with me in the same way that I have passed it on to you. It was never a list of ingredients, but a sort of kitchen poem. On gloomy days I came home sad or beat up from school, she would have a kutchen in the oven. Long before my tale of woe was even halfway through. She always acted as if it was nothing. To me, it was everything.

When my wife and I were still newlyweds, one of Amy's friends had an emergency. While she cared for her pal, I scooped up a crying baby. Singing Irish folk songs in my low baritone. Cradling the now cooing child in my left arm while I cleaned the kitchen, I

baked a kutchen. Then I made a big pot of tea and served everybody.

Ladies present watched me with a bewildered expression. They would have been less surprised to see a Russian circus bear on a unicycle doing housework. I had to explain to them a couple of times that I grew up in a Pennsylvania Dutch kitchen. Caring for others is what we do.

That was a good day. Home cooking creates so many opportunities for joy.

I should also note that my skills in the kitchen have limits. The first time I cooked dinner for my then fiancé... Well, I set her kitchen on fire. Full-on flames and billows of smoke. As I was running in circles waving a flaming oven mitt, she was on the phone. I thought she had dialed 911. Instead, she called my parents.

*Amy: "My kitchen is on fire. He set my kitchen on fire."*

*Mom: (laughing and unsurprised) "He's your problem now!"*

The fire was promptly extinguished. The dinner was darn near perfect, barring the scent of oven mitt flambé still wafting.

As I was cleaning up the mess, she kissed me.

Back to the task at hand. By now, my kitchen is clean. I have my cup of tea and the timer is about to go off. I stick a knife into the dessert. If no crumbs stick to the blade, I know it is ready.

Now it is time to drag the pan out of the oven. Cut a slice while the caramelized butter is still singing and sizzling along the edges.

The dough is fluffy and light. The peaches are soft and sweet. The crust's caramelized sugar and butter is crunchy. I savor the

taste. Flooded with memories of hundreds of treats shared with loved ones in the kitchen.

I always wait until I have a taste before I tell anybody the kutchen is ready. That is terrible of me, I know. In my defense, family and friends will descend on fresh baked peach kutchen like buzzards on a gut wagon. In moments, the pan will be empty.

This is a good thing. It is right and proper to nourish people we care about. You also don't want to eat more than a slice of kutchen at one time. After all, it's a sugary fruit pancake baked over an entire stick of butter! One slice is enough.

The added benefit of being left to clean the kutchen pan is that I get to gobble the bits of buttery crust stuck to the pan. Oh! It's good.

I hope you give this recipe a try. Work the ingredients together. Think about the farmers who raised the wheat, peaches, milk, and butter. So many delivery services are required to bring good things like butter and flour to your table. Farmers and truck drivers made that happen, so give them a thought. Even a prayer.

Some of the best people I have met were either farmers or truck drivers.

As you bake, take in the scent and texture of the mixture as you work. Feel the heat from the oven. The comfort of your kitchen and home. These are all good things that we buzz by in our daily rush.

This is a good recipe to practice. Guests are often charmed by this alchemy of simple ingredients and a hot pan full of butter. Throwing a kutchen together while doting on a friend is good for

both parties. We all need to care for people. We all need the solace of having someone care for us.

Humble canned peaches, sugar, flour, butter, a dash of salt, and milk. A simple recipe from my childhood that has warmed my body and soul for as long as I remember.

I hope you bake a kutchen for the people you love. Just think to snag yourself a slice before ringing the dinner bell. This stuff goes fast!