

Cherry-Almond-Ricotta Strudel

Sour cherries are paired with a sweet ricotta filling and cookie crumb mixture all rolled in sheets of flaky Phyllo for a delicious dessert that takes advantage of locally-grown sour cherries. Since many orchards pit and freeze their cherries for you, this is a recipe you can enjoy all year long!

Makes 4 individual strudels

- o 24 ounces frozen, pitted sour cherries
- o 15 ounces ricotta cheese
- o 3 tablespoons honey
- o ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- o ¼ teaspoon almond extract
- o 1 egg
- o ½ cup crushed Italian Amaretti cookies
- o 2 tablespoons melted butter
- o 16 sheets packaged phyllo, thawed if frozen (14x9 inch)
- o butter spray, or 3 tablespoons melted butter
- o 2 tablespoons Amaretto liqueur
- o slivered almonds, optional

Place frozen cherries in a strainer over a bowl, let thaw and place in refrigerator for 4 hours or overnight to let drain thoroughly.

Place ricotta cheese in a coffee-filter lined strainer over a bowl and let drain for the same amount of time that the cherries drain (4 hours to overnight).

To make the strudel fillings:

Place drained ricotta cheese in a clean dishtowel and squeeze to remove as much liquid as possible.

Place ricotta in a bowl with the honey, vanilla extract, almond extract, and egg. Stir to combine. Place in refrigerator until ready to assemble the strudels.

In a separate bowl, place Amaretti cookie crumbs and melted butter. Stir until butter is evenly distributed and cookie crumbs are slightly moist.

In a separate bowl, place 1 cup of the drained cherries and stir in Amaretto. Set aside until ready to serve the strudels.

Take remaining cherries still in the strainer and press with the back of a wooden spoon to remove as much remaining moisture as possible. Now you're ready to assemble the strudels!

To assemble the strudels:

Unroll phyllo and cover with a damp dishtowel (keep covered while working with individual sheets so they don't dry out).

Place one sheet of phyllo on work surface with short side toward you. Spray with butter spray (or brush lightly with melted butter) starting at the edges, which tend to dry out more quickly.

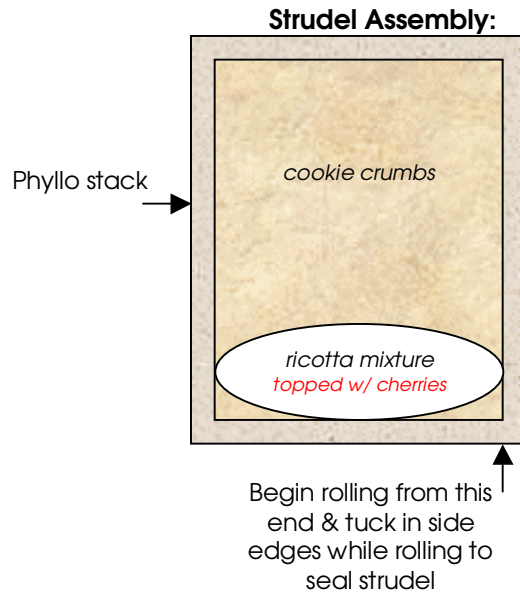
Remove a second sheet of phyllo and carefully lay it on top of the first. Spray (or brush) the second sheet with more butter. Repeat with a third and fourth sheet to make your first phyllo stack. Repeat this process three more times until you have four individual stacks, each with four sheets of phyllo.

Evenly divide the cookie crumbs and sprinkle over each of the four phyllo stacks, leaving about one inch of dough around the edges so you have room to seal the strudels. (see illustration)

Next, evenly divide the ricotta mixture and place in a log-type shape at the bottom of each phyllo stack, leaving about 1 inch of the dough at the bottom and side of the stack.

Finally, evenly divide drained and pressed cherries and place on top of the cheese mixture on each phyllo stack.

To roll up each strudel, begin at the bottom edge of the phyllo stack and fold the edge up over the ricotta & cherries. Gradually roll up the strudel, being sure to tuck in the side edges in as you roll to completely enclose the filling in the phyllo.



Place the rolled strudels, seam-side down, on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and spray (or brush) the tops of the strudels with butter.

Bake strudels at 350 degrees for approximately 30 minutes, or until the pastry is golden brown and flaky.

Remove from oven and place on cooling rack. Let cool for at least 20 minutes before serving.

To serve the strudels:

Slice the strudels in four pieces on a diagonal. Sprinkle with confectioner's sugar, top with Amaretto-soaked cherries and slivered almonds.