

Cookin' up coconut cream pies

Hawesville restaurant reveals secret recipe

HANCOCK COUNTY, Ky. – Marie Irby arrives at her Hawesville restaurant – Irby's -- about 1:30 every morning.

Everything at Irby's is made from scratch, including her pies. Early morning is a good time for baking. Years ago, Irby found a recipe for Coconut Cream Pie. "I experimented with it until I got it the way I wanted."

Now, it's an Irby's favorite.

To-die-for meringue sits 3 to 4 inches high on top the dreamy coconut filling. But what's so different about Irby's recipe? The biggie: Instead of vanilla flavoring, she uses coconut flavoring. And she adds lots of grated coconut in the filling.

"When you take a bit of my coconut pie, it tastes like coconut," she says.

The restaurant goes through tons of desserts each day. Irby mixes things up a bit. Chess and pecan are popular pies, too. And her Punch Bowl Cake is a crowd pleaser.

Irby doesn't put Coconut Cream Pies on the menu every day. She fears people will tire of them. But when Irby makes them, guests chow through about four a day.

Here's her secret recipe:

Coconut Cream Pie

¾ c. sugar

¼ c. cornstarch

4 eggs (separated – put yolks in the filling and whites in the meringue)

1 tsp coconut flavoring

2 ½ c. whole milk

½ c. grated coconut

Mix together the sugar and cornstarch. Then, mix dry and wet ingredients. Stir with a whisk. Microwave 6 ½ to 7 minutes, stirring two or three times. Add ½ cup of grated coconut. Stir ingredients and pour into baked pie shell.

Meringue

2 tbsp sugar

1 tbsp cornstarch

½ c. water

Mix together the sugar and cornstarch. Add the water. Cook in the microwave until clear.

4 egg whites

¼ c. sugar

Sprinkle of coconut

Beat the egg whites and sugar until the mixture stands in peaks. Add the sugar-cornstarch-water mixture and beat one minute more. Heap this meringue mixture on top the pie filling. Add a sprinkle of grated coconut on top and bake at 350 degrees until golden brown.