

# PIE TO DIE FOR

BY WANDA HENNIG

“When you come to my house, you come straight to the kitchen,” says Brentwood’s sweet potato pie queen, Beverly Jefferson-Dasté. “It’s where we gather—where the love is—and I always have something prepared for unexpected guests. That’s the Southern way—to feed your guests to let them know you appreciate that they’ve taken the time to come and visit you.”

Dasté, 66, who worked for the postal service for 33 years, started baking sweet potato pies commercially—and the old fashioned way—about three years ago. “I always had my dream of going into business for myself,” she says. One day she woke up to the fact that she had grandchildren and great-grandchildren and thought, “Before it’s too late, let me start pleasing myself and do what I’ve always wanted to do. So that’s what I did.”

She knew her sweet potato pies were good. “I belonged to the post office social club until I retired and when I sold my pies at club fund-raisers, everybody loved them.”

She decided to call her business “Gran’ma Lillie” Ol’ Fashioned Sweet Potato Pies in honor of her late mother, Lillie. “When we were young, she gave me the chore of cooking pies,”

says Dasté, who makes her pies from scratch, in small batches (“the flavor is better that way”) in a commercial kitchen. But exactly like her mother and grandmother taught her. “Yes, in a bowl, with a whisk and a spoon. Everything is beaten and whipped by hand.” Her muscle tone provides the evidence.

Dasté, who was born in Bogalusa, Louisiana, drives each week to the Jack London Square Farmers Market in Oakland to hand-pick her sweet potatoes. She grinds her own spices and now offers more than 20 sweet potato pie flavors, some of which are sugar-free, plus a to-die-for pecan pie. “The favorites are the Brentwood corn, the classic—that’s the traditional sweet potato pie—the coconut, the lemon, the rum, the brandy, and the banana.” Around the holidays she adds an eggnog sweet potato pie.

Last year was her first at the Brentwood Farmers’ Market—and she was overwhelmed by the response. This year she added Livermore and Pittsburg, and sells out every time. “I have a little fan club. I’m so honored, so humbled,” she says. It seems no matter how you slice her pies, they cut it.

Find Dasté’s pies year-round at the Pittsburg Farmers Market, seasonally at the Brentwood and Livermore markets (which close in October); at The Health Hut, 601 Chestnut Street, Brentwood; or call Dasté with custom orders at least two days ahead of time at (925) 516-8434. 🍷

## GRAN’MA LILLIE SIMPLE SWEET POTATO PIE FILLING

- 1 1-pound sweet potato (yam)
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 cup white sugar
- ½ cup milk
- 2 eggs
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 9-inch unbaked piecrust

Boil sweet potato whole in skin for 40 to 50 minutes or until done. Run cold water over it and remove the skin.

Break apart sweet potato in a bowl. Add butter and mix well with mixer. Stir in sugar, milk, eggs, nutmeg, cinnamon, and vanilla. Beat on medium speed until mixture is smooth. Pour filling into unbaked piecrust. (Dasté chose not to share her secret piecrust recipe. She suggests purchasing a piecrust or using a favorite recipe.)

Bake at 350° for 55 to 60 minutes, or until knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Expect pie to puff up like a soufflé then sink as it cools.

