Pot Pies: Comfort Food Under Cover
by Diane Phillips

Diane Phillips lures you into her cookbook with a picture of the perfect pot pie, topped with a lid of golden-brown, flaky crust. Inside this cookbook, though, you'll find that what Phillips offers is not your grandmother's labor-intensive pot pie. Indeed, most of the 75 recipes are suited to the limited time and dietary desires of today's cooks. Her easy-to-assemble fillings emphasize chicken breast, lean meat, and other healthful ingredients, while the toppings can be put together in a snap. About the only old-fashioned thing Phillips keeps in her pot pies is lots of full, intense flavor. The first recipe, Chicken Bouillabaisse with Rouille Crust, tells it all. The filling consists of boneless thighs simmered with white wine, saffron, tomatoes, and rice. For a crust, you spread toasted slices of French bread with a garlicky red pepper and olive oil purée, set them over the casserole-like filling, and bake until everything is bubbling hot. Reading on, you realize that Phillips sees a pot pie simply as something covered by a layer of something. Ryan's Pie, chicken chunks in thyme-perfumed cream sauce under a puff pastry lid, is as close to classic as she gets. From there, you find such combinations as turkey meatloaf baked under a layer of mashed potatoes enriched with bacon and sour cream, and lean pork, stewed Tuscan-style with red wine and vegetables, served under a polenta crust. Phillips is so creative in working her idea that you are fascinated even by the delicious-looking results from her most fanciful flights, in which everything from tortillas and risotto to slices of sautéed eggplant, mashed beans, ratatouille, and a blue-cheese custard serve as toppings. Among the least-expected choices are a stir-fry topped with a pancake of pan-crisped noodles, and sautéed fish covered with mango salsa and passed under the broiler. Phillips tells when you can make a dish in steps, and how long each one keeps in the refrigerator and in the freezer. For those concerned about fat, she tells how to substitute leaner choices in place of cheese, cream, and butter. If you like casserole cooking, want to get stimulating variety for basics like boneless chicken, and appreciate the value of one-dish meals, Pot Pies will be a pleasing kitchen companion. --Dana Jacobi
My Personal Review:
This comfy cookbook is dedicated to that wonderful staple food, potpies! The first chapter is a handy set of instructions on setting up a pantry. After that, the fun really begins! There are four potpie chapters: chicken and turkey, meat (beef, pork and lamb), seafood, and vegetable. Potpies of every description are included: all-American, Cajun, Mediterranean, SouthWest, and much more. What is nice, is that the recipes for crusts and contents are spelled out, which means that you can mix and match, or whatever. This is a great book, one that I am glad that we bought. So far, we?ve made Ryan?s Pie (p. 46), Beef Filets with Wild Mushroom and Maytag Blue Cheese Topping (p. 77), and (my personal favorite) Mom?s Beef Stew Topped with Sage Parmesan Biscuits (p. 88). This is a great book, full of easy-to-make recipes; I highly recommend it!

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