CHEESE AND HERB QUICHE

Makes one 9- to 11-inch or four 4-inch tarts

1 recipe Piret's Quiche Pastry (page 103), partially baked

4 ounces cream cheese, softened
½ cup sour cream
2 tablespoons unbleached, all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
⅛ to ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
2 eggs
1¼ cup milk or half-and-half
1½ cups (about 4 ounces) freshly grated Swiss or Gruyère cheese
2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese
3 tablespoons sliced scallions
3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
1 tablespoon fresh chives or other herb (such as basil, dill, or watercress)

1. Beat together until smooth the cream cheese, sour cream, flour, salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Beat in the eggs, blending them well, then beat in the milk or half-and-half.

2. Preheat oven to 375°. Sprinkle the Swiss and Parmesan cheeses, scallions, parsley, and chives in the prepared pastry shell. Gently pour in the cream cheese mixture. Place the filled pan on a baking sheet, and bake the quiche for 45 minutes, or until the custard is just set. Let the quiche rest 8 to 10 minutes before slicing and serving it.

PIRET'S QUICHE PASTRY

Fits 11-inch quiche pan, 9-inch pie pan, or four 4-inch tart pans

1½ cups (7 ounces) unbleached, all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
6 tablespoons (3 ounces) chilled unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces
3 tablespoons (1 ounce) shortening, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 egg
3 tablespoons ice water

1. Place the flour and salt in the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the steel blade, and blend them for 1 second. Add the butter and shortening, and process them with 4 or 5 on/off pulses. Small bits of butter and shortening should still be visible. Whisk together the egg and ice water, and add them to the work bowl. Process the dough for 4 or 5 on/off pulses, until the pastry just begins to stick together. Turn the pastry out onto a lightly floured surface and gently press it into a thick disc. Wrap it in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes. It also may be wrapped for freezing and frozen at this point. Let it thaw overnight in the refrigerator before rolling. (To mix the dough by hand, stir together the flour and salt, and cut in the butter and shortening with a pastry blender or two knives, until the mixture looks like small peas. Using a fork, add the egg-water mixture and toss until the pastry just holds together. Turn it out onto a lightly floured surface, press it into a thick disc, and refrigerate as directed above.)

2. Roll the pastry no more than ¼-inch thick, and cut it to fit the quiche, pie, or tart pan with a small overhang. Line the pan with the pastry (be careful not to stretch it), pinch up a rim, and prick the bottom all over with a fork.

3. If the filling you are using is very moist, or if you wish to use a filling such as pastry cream or fresh fruit, bake the pastry empty (or "blind"), until it is partially or completely cooked, to seal the bottom so the filling won't make it soggy: Preheat oven to 400°. Fit aluminum foil or parchment paper into the pastry-lined pan and fill it with about ½ inch of dried beans, uncooked rice, or small metal pie weights. For a quiche with a moist filling, bake the pastry partially, for 10 to 15 minutes, then remove the liner and weights. Proceed to fill as indicated. If the pastry shell is to be used with a precooked filling or filled with fresh fruit, remove the liner and weights from the partially baked pastry shell, return the pastry to the oven, and finish baking it, empty, until the pastry just begins to take on a very light beige color (about 10 minutes). Cool the pastry before adding the filling.