Mini Quiche

Makes 24

1 bunch pencil asparagus, trimmed
Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup heavy cream
2 large eggs
1 large egg yolk
Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
All-purpose flour, for work surface
1/2 recipe Pâte Brisée (recipe follows)
3 ounces finely shredded Gruyère cheese
2 ounces cooked ham, cut into 1/4-inch pieces

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Bring a medium pot of water to a boil. Cut 3 inches from the tip-ends of the asparagus; reserving remaining stalks for another use. Generously add salt to boiling water. Add asparagus, and cook until just tender, about 2 minutes. Drain well. Cut into 1/2-inch pieces; set aside.

2. In a medium bowl, whisk together milk, heavy cream, eggs, yolk, and nutmeg. Season with salt and pepper. Strain through a sieve into a medium bowl; set aside.

3. On a lightly floured surface, roll out pâte brisée to slightly less than 1/8 inch thick. Use a 2 3/4-inch round cutter to cut out 24 rounds. Fit rounds into a 24-cup nonstick mini muffin tin. If the pâte brisée becomes too soft to work with, place in refrigerator to chill for 15 minutes. Divide half of Gruyère evenly between the lined cups. Top with ham. Divide milk mixture evenly between cups. Top each with 3 to 4 pieces of asparagus. Sprinkle with remaining Gruyère.

4. Bake until puffed and golden brown, about 30 minutes. Remove from oven; immediately remove quiches from muffin tin, and transfer to a wire rack. Serve warm or at room temperature.
Pâte Brisée

Makes 1 double-crust or 2 single-crust 9- to 10-inch pies

Pâte brisée is the French version of classic pie or tart pastry. Pressing the dough into a disk rather than shaping it into a ball allows it to chill faster. This will also make the dough easier to roll out, and if you freeze it, it will thaw more quickly.

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into small pieces
1/4 to 1/2 cup ice water

1. In the bowl of a food processor, combine flour, salt, and sugar. Add butter, and process until the mixture resembles coarse meal, 8 to 10 seconds.

2. With machine running, add ice water in a slow, steady stream through feed tube. Pulse until dough holds together without being wet or sticky; be careful not to process more than 30 seconds. To test, squeeze a small amount together: If it is crumbly, add more ice water, 1 tablespoon at a time.

3. Divide dough into two equal balls. Flatten each ball into a disk, and wrap in plastic. Transfer to the refrigerator, and chill at least 1 hour. Dough may be stored, frozen, up to 1 month.