

CREME BRULEE

CUSTARD CREAM WITH A BURNT SUGAR TOPPING

Serves 8

INGREDIENTS

2 whole vanilla beans
1 qt. heavy cream
1 cup sugar
7 egg yolks

MAKING THE CUSTARD

Preheat the oven to 325 F.

Using a small, sharp paring knife, split the vanilla beans lengthwise in two. Scald the cream with the split vanilla beans and 1/3 cup of the sugar. Whisk together the yolks and another 1/3 cup of the sugar. While whisking, pour the scalded cream over the yolk/sugar mixture. Keep whisking until combined. Remove the split vanilla beans. Scrape out the seeds into the custard mixture. Strain the custard through a fine sieve.

Ladle the custard into eight 4-1/2 x 3/4-inch shallow custard cups. Place the cups in a pan of hot water that comes halfway up the sides of the cups. Bake 30 to 40 minutes or until set. Cool to room temperature. When ready to serve, sprinkle the tops of the custards with a thin layer of the remaining 1/3 cup sugar. For best results use a salamander. Alternatively, preheat the broiler, then place the custards in a baking pan filled with crushed ice. Caramelize under the hot broiler, watching carefully so that the sugar bubbles and browns, but doesn't burn.

CHOOSING THE CREME BRULEE DISHES

You'll need 8 individual shallow custard dishes, about 4 inches in diameter and about 3/4-inch deep. This will provide the right amount of surface to filling. If the cups are too deep, there won't be enough caramel for every bite.

USING A SALAMANDER

For best results, use an old-fashioned cast-iron salamander to burn the cream. Named after the legendary animal that resists fire, this simple iron will burn or brand the sugar without overcooking the underlying custard layer.

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