

CLASSIC CREME BRULEE

You will need a kitchen blowtorch to caramelize the tops of the custards after they are baked. You can also run them under a preheated broiler, but it's not as reliable as using a torch.

Ingredients:

1 quart heavy whipping cream
2 cups granulated sugar, plus more for caramelizing on top of custards
2 vanilla beans, split down the middle
14 egg yolks

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Set 10 4-ounce ovenproof ramekins or custard cups in a roasting pan. Bring pot of water to a boil. Turn off heat.

Combine cream, sugar and split vanilla beans in a nonreactive saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Turn off heat and allow vanilla beans to steep in hot cream for 10 minutes. Remove vanilla beans, scraping out centers into cream.

Return cream to a boil. Meanwhile, whisk yolks in a bowl, then pour in hot cream, whisking constantly, in a thin stream. Don't overmix and make a lot of foam on surface of mixture.

Strain custard into another bowl and allow it to stand 5 minutes. Skim foam from surface and bring bowl of custard to the stove. Place pan of custard cups on the stove and fill them with custard mixture. Place pan on middle rack of oven and pour in enough warm water to come about halfway up the sides of cups. (If pan is crowded, it may be necessary to remove one cup temporarily to have room to pour in the water.) Bake custards about 30 minutes until set but not puffed. Carefully remove pan from oven and use a large spatula to remove custard cups. Refrigerate them covered until ready to caramelize.

Sprinkle each custard with a tablespoon or two of sugar, spreading it evenly. Use a blowtorch to caramelize the sugar to a golden brown, moving the flame in a series of arcs to avoid leaving it in one place too long and burning the sugar. Serve caramelized custards within several hours.

