Crème Caramel

The best recipes are simple yet impressive, like this French classic. Best of all it's made ahead of time and just whipped out of the fridge when you're ready to serve. Two tips help ensure success: dissolving the sugar in the eggs means you beat them less giving a more delicate custard – and allowing the milk to cool before adding it ensures you don't end up with scrambled egg. Freeze leftover egg whites to make another simple yet impressive dessert, pavlova. The slight bitterness of the caramel balances out the sweetness, it also means a wine that's not too sweet, like a Moscato d'Asti, works well – try the deliciously grapey, off-dry Alasia.

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS

- 4 eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- ⅓ cup castor sugar
- 400ml milk
- 300ml cream
- ½ vanilla bean

Caramel

- ¾ cup castor sugar
- ¾ cup water

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 160°C.
2. Place eggs, egg yolks and sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer. Stir to combine and set aside.
3. Combine milk and cream in a saucepan, scrape in vanilla seeds and add the vanilla pod. Heat until just simmering then set aside to cool.
4. Meanwhile, make Caramel: combine sugar and water in a small saucepan. Place over a medium-high heat and bring to the boil. Boil, without stirring, for 20-25 minutes, until dark golden.
5. Working quickly before the caramel sets, divide it between 6 x 1-cup ovenproof dariole moulds or ramekins and swirl to coat the base.
6. Place a tea towel in the bottom of a baking dish, put moulds on top, evenly spaced, and set aside.
7. Whisk egg mixture for a minute or so, just until well combined and slightly thickened.
8. Discard vanilla pod, and whisk milk mixture into egg mixture on medium speed just until well combined.
9. Strain into moulds.
10. Pour boiling water into the baking dish until it comes half-way up the sides of the moulds.
11. Cover with foil, poke a few holes in it to allow steam to escape, and place in oven for 40 minutes or so, until a skewer inserted near the edge comes out clean (they may still be slightly unset in the centre).
12. Discard foil and set aside to cool in the water.
13. Refrigerate overnight.
14. Place a plate on top of moulds, turn upside down and tap firmly to unmould (depending on the mould you may need to run a knife around the edge to loosen them first).

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