



Honey Soufflé with Earl Gray Anglaise

Ethereally delicate, soufflés carry a dramatic mystique that marvels and captivates just about any diner. As temperamental as they seem, soufflés are actually quite a simple, forgiving and playful pursuit. Consisting of only two components - a base (most often a pastry cream, purée or béchamel) suspended in a stiff meringue - a soufflé rises into an impossibly light, fluffy custard with a melting texture as it bakes. Warm and uniquely comforting, this honey soufflé alone is breathtaking, but the Earl Gray anglaise is a charming match for it. Contrary to the popular assumption that soufflés are an à la minute affair, the mystifying dessert can actually be prepared fully in advance, refrigerated and just baked to order.

4-8 servings, depending on the size of the ramekins

Ingredients

For the Earl Gray anglaise:

1 cup heavy cream
½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped
1 tablespoon loose leaf Earl Gray tea leaves
Pinch salt
3 egg yolks, room temperature
¼ cup sugar

For the honey soufflé:

About 2 tablespoons butter, softened, for greasing the ramekins
About ¼ cup sugar, for the ramekins
1 cup whole milk
½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped
1 teaspoon lemon zest
3 egg yolks
¼ cup honey
2 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons cornstarch
½ teaspoon salt
4 egg whites, room temperature
¼ cup sugar

Equipment

Candy thermometer
Handheld or standing electric mixer
Handheld whisk
Pastry brush
Ramekins or ceramic mugs - we prefer individual (eight 2-ounce, four 4-ounce, three 6-ounce or two 8-ounce) ramekins for presentation, but any size can be used

Preparation

Prepare the Earl Gray anglaise:

Combine the cream, vanilla bean, tea and salt in a medium saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Let steep for 5-10 minutes. Remove from the heat and strain through a fine mesh sieve.

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In a medium bowl, beat the egg yolks and sugar until pale and thick, about 3 minutes. Temper the yolks with the warm cream by slowly pouring a small amount of the cream into the yolks while whisking constantly. Add the rest of the cream to the tempered yolks and return the mixture to the saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until thick and the temperature on a candy thermometer reads 180° F. Be careful not to overcook it by heating above 180° F or the anglaise will curdle and separate. To check if it is the right consistency, the custard should coat the back of a wooden spoon and a streak should remain when you run your finger through the cream.

Remove from the heat and strain again through a fine mesh sieve to ensure smoothness. The anglaise can either be served now while warm or chilled by placing the bowl in an ice bath to cool. To store, cover with plastic wrap, pressing down against the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until well chilled, about 1-2 hours. To serve the anglaise warm after refrigerating, slowly reheat in a microwave at 15 second intervals, stirring after each interval.

[Chef's Note: The anglaise can be prepared up to 3 days in advance.]

Prepare the honey soufflé:

Prepare the molds by buttering the insides with a pastry brush in upward brush strokes making sure to cover every inch of the mold. Pour a small amount of sugar into the bottom of each mold and carefully swirl the ramekin, dumping out the excess, to completely coat with a light dusting of sugar. Place the molds in the refrigerator or freezer until the soufflé mixture is prepared.

[Chef's Note: Inadequately buttered ramekins will produce an uneven rise or prevent it completely. The light dusting of sugar also helps to give the soufflé a lattice to climb while baking. The molds can be prepared up to 1 week in advance.]

Place the milk, vanilla bean and zest in a small saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat; remove from the heat and let steep for 5 minutes. Whisk together the egg yolks, honey, 2 tablespoons sugar, cornstarch and salt in a large bowl until thoroughly combined. Strain the milk mixture using a fine mesh sieve into a measuring cup with a spout and carefully temper the egg yolk mixture by slowly pouring the milk into the eggs while whisking constantly. Pour everything back into the pot and cook over medium heat while whisking until the mixture thickens, pulls away from the sides of the pan and no longer tastes of cornstarch. Transfer to another bowl and cover with plastic wrap, pressing it directly onto the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Cool completely, about 1 hour.

[Chef's Note: The pastry cream base can be prepared up to 3 days in advance and refrigerated until ready for use.]

Place the egg whites into a clean, dry non-reactive bowl and whisk on low speed using a handheld or standing electric mixer. Once the eggs become foamy and frothy, begin adding the sugar 1 tablespoon at a time until all the sugar has been incorporated. Continue whipping, slowly increasing the speed, until the egg whites become very stiff. Immediately fold the egg whites into the cooled pastry cream in three additions until thoroughly combined, being careful to use a fluid motion and not deflate the egg whites.

Remove the ramekins from the refrigerator. Fill each ramekin to the top, and then flatten the tops with an offset metal spatula or the back of a knife. Clean off any excess batter that may have dripped onto the sides of the ramekins. The soufflés can now either be baked, stored for later in the refrigerator for up to 4 hours or stored in the freezer for up to 5 days.

To bake the soufflés: Preheat the oven to 350° F. If using frozen soufflés, make sure to remove them from the freezer one hour before baking. Place the soufflés on a flat baking sheet and bake on the bottom rack of the oven. The baking time will be significantly less, 7-10 minutes, if using smaller sized ramekins and about 15-20 minutes if using larger 8-ounce ramekins. Rotate the baking sheet half-way through the baking time to ensure even cooking. The soufflés are finished when they have risen 1-2 inches above the tops of the ramekins, the top has light color and they appear sturdy. Remove from the oven and sprinkle a light dusting of powdered sugar over the surface of the soufflé for a finished look. Serve immediately with Earl Gray crème anglaise.

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