



Pear and Lavender Crème Brûlée

Don't be frightened by the intensity of the lavender aroma of this recipe. Once the cream is baked, you are left with a subtle, haunting floral note that is absolutely bewitching with the pear.

Makes eight (8) 4- to 6-ounce servings

Ingredients

2 medium, ripe Bosc pears & 2 ripe Sekel pears, peeled, cored, and coarsely chopped (to yield a total of app. 3 cups)
3/4 cup sparkling wine
1 teaspoon pure vanilla
3 cups heavy cream
2 teaspoons lavender
10 egg yolks
Scant 1/2 cup sugar (use less if the pears are especially sweet and ripe)

Preparation

Preheat the oven to 325 F. Place the ramekins for the crème brûlée in a deep baking pan, making sure the ramekins do not touch each other.

Place the chopped pear and sparkling wine in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a simmer and allow the pears to cook until soft, about 15 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the vanilla. Allow to cool for about 10 minutes. Place the pears into a blender and purée until smooth. Measure out 1 cup of the purée and reserve the remaining for another use.

[Chef's Note: In the off-season, stir 1 tablespoon of fresh lemon juice into the pear purée to brighten the flavor.]

Meanwhile, in a heavy-bottomed, medium sauce pan, place the cream and the lavender. Stir to combine and place over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil and immediately reduce the heat. Simmer the lavender in the cream for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow the lavender to steep an additional 10 minutes. Strain the cream into a clean bowl.

Whisk the pear purée into the cream. Strain the mixture through a fine mesh sieve into a clean bowl.

Place the egg yolks into a medium bowl, add the sugar, and whisk vigorously until the sugar is incorporated and the mixture turns thick and pale yellow. Gradually whisk in the cream mixture. Rap the bowl on the counter to release any air that was incorporated into the mixture, and check the mixture for texture. If it still seems like there's a bit of a grain from the pear, strain the mixture once again into another bowl, or as you are filling the ramekins.

Using a ladle, pour the mixture into the ramekins. Skim off any foam that forms on the surface.

Pour hot water into the baking pan so that it reaches about half-way up the side of the ramekins. Bake until the custards are firm, but the centers are still a bit loose, about 50 to 55 minutes.

Remove from the baking pan and cool completely on a wire rack. Wrap in cling film and refrigerate until ready to serve.

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Service

Sprinkle a light layer of brown sugar over the surface of each crème brûlée. Using a culinary torch, caramelize the sugar. As an alternative, place the ramekins on a baking sheet and place under a broiler. Watch carefully to avoid burning the sugar. The tops should caramelize in 1 ½ to 2 minutes. Serve immediately, or return to the refrigerator until ready to serve.

[Chef's Note: Caramelizing the sugar under a broiler is a snap, but it is critical that your oven be cool, and only the broiler element working. Placing crème brûlée into a hot oven to caramelize the top will likely result in your crème brûlée becoming liquid custard. If you need to, caramelize the tops before preparing your dinner in the oven, and hold them in the refrigerator until ready to serve.]

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