

Buttermilk Panna Cotta with Chianti Syrup

“Panna cotta” in Italian means “cooked cream.” This simple dessert includes cream, sugar and vanilla simmered gently and thickened with gelatin, giving it a smooth and creamy texture. Compote is prepared by cooking fresh or dried fruits in a liquid with flavorings, such as vanilla, cinnamon, or as in the case of this recipe, orange zest and brandy

Yield: 8 servings

2 tablespoons cold water

1-1/2 teaspoons powdered unflavored gelatin

1-1/4 cups heavy whipping cream

1 teaspoon lemon zest

1-1/3 cup granulated sugar, divided

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1-3/4 cups buttermilk

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 (750 ml) bottle Chianti wine

Place the cold water into a medium bowl and sprinkle the gelatin over. Let stand until the gelatin softens, about 5 minutes.

While the gelatin is soaking, use a whisk to combine the cream, lemon zest and 1/3 cup of sugar into a medium saucepan and place on the stove over a moderate-high heat, using a silicone spatula to stir occasionally until the sugar dissolves, about 5 minutes. Bring the liquid to a simmer, stirring occasionally. Stir the cream into the bowl with gelatin. Use a silicone spatula to stir in the vanilla, buttermilk and salt. Use a fine-mesh strainer to strain the liquid into a measuring jug with a spout.

Pour the custard into 8 4-ounce ramekins and refrigerate until set, about 3 hours.

To prepare red wine syrup: Place wine and remaining 1 cup sugar in a large saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce mixture to a volume of 1 cup, about 18 to 20 minutes. Remove syrup from heat and cool completely. Cover and chill until cold.

To serve: Dip the ramekins into a small dish of hot water and then invert the custards onto the plates. Serve immediately with Chianti wine syrup drizzle over the top.

Tiramisu

In Italian, “tiramisu” means “pick me up,” certainly because of the strong brewed coffee used to moisten the lady fingers. The addition of orange juice and zest provides a refreshing citrus zip to this rich dessert. Make sure to serve this dessert within two hours of assembly to preserve the texture of the lady fingers.

Yield: 8 servings

15 Italian ladyfingers

1 cup strong brewed coffee or brewed espresso, cooled to room temperature

4 tablespoons sugar, divided

2-1/4 cups (18 ounces) Mascarpone cheese, room temperature

2 tablespoons vanilla bean paste

1/2 cup sweet sherry or Marsala*

1 tablespoon orange juice

1 (4 ounce) piece of fine-quality bittersweet chocolate, shaved into curls with a vegetable peeler

To prepare soaking liquid: In a 9x9-inch baking dish, arrange the lady fingers in a tightly packed layer. Add 2 tablespoons sugar to coffee, stirring to dissolve. Pour coffee mixture evenly over lady fingers, allowing the coffee to be fully absorbed.

To prepare filling: Place mascarpone in a medium mixing bowl and stir in remaining 2 tablespoons sugar using a silicone spatula. Add vanilla bean paste, sherry and orange juice to the mascarpone mixture, stirring to combine. If mixture is stiff, add additional tablespoons of orange juice until smooth. Pour the remaining orange juice over the lady fingers.

Using a silicone spatula; spread the mascarpone mixture to evenly cover the lady fingers. Sprinkle mascarpone with chocolate curls. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes to 2 hours before serving.

To serve: Spoon tiramisu into 8 chilled dessert dishes, garnish with mint leaves and serve immediately.

*Note: If you do not have true Marsala, you may use cooking marsala found in the vinegar aisle of the grocery store. Or omit and add vanilla as will be discussed in class.

Flourless Chocolate Almond Cake

125 grams (4.4 oz) blanched almonds (or almond meal)
125 grams (4.4 oz) good quality dark chocolate (I use 70% cocoa)
125 grams (4.4 oz or 1 stick plus 1 tablespoon) unsalted butter, chopped
125 grams (4.4 oz or 1/2 cup) sugar
3 large eggs, separated and left to come to room temperature

Directions

Grease and line a 20 cm or 8 inch round cake tin with baking paper (I like to use a springform tin or one with a removable base for this delicate cake) and preheat oven to 160°C or 320°F.

If using whole blanched almonds, blitz them to a very fine, sandy texture in a food processor. Set aside.

Place the chocolate, broken up, in a metal or glass bowl set over a double boiler. When melted, remove the bowl from the heat and add the butter, stirring with spatula to help it melt. Then add the sugar and the almond meal.

Once the mixture is no longer hot, add the egg yolks and stir to combine.

In a separate bowl, whip the egg whites with beaters to soft, fluffy peaks. Fold the whites gently through the chocolate and almond batter.

Pour the batter into the cake tin, smooth over the top and bake for approximately 40 minutes or until the top appears dry and a skewer inserted in the middle comes out with a few moist crumbs attached (not wet batter). It is important not to overcook this cake so that it retains its wonderful moist consistency. Let cool completely.

Dust with powdered sugar and, if desired, some lightly whipped cream.