

Impressive Crème Brûlée

Crème brûlée (krem broo-lay), meaning “burnt cream,” is a baked custard dessert topped with a thin layer of caramelized sugar. This delicious dessert is commonly served in individual ramekins.

The origin of crème brûlée is unclear. Like most famous desserts, France, England, and Spain all claim they were the “first” to create the dessert. In 1691, crème brûlée first appeared in French chef François Massialot’s cookbook. He used the name “burnt cream” in the English translation of this recipe in 1702.

This dessert is made with a deliciously rich custard base of eggs, sugar, heavy cream, and vanilla. The hard candy-like shell topping is made of fine sugar that is caramelized with a kitchen torch or oven broiler. Sometimes liquor is added to the topping and lit on fire for a dramatic presentation.

The thought of making crème brûlée can be intimidating if you have never made it. Trust me when I tell you, it is easier than you think! Crème brûlée can be made hours or even days in advance! It is made with a handful of ingredients and the prep time is minimal.

The custard for this dessert can be made in two ways: the “hot” or the “cold” method. When using the “hot” method, the egg yolks and sugar are whisked together in a double boiler, then the heavy cream and vanilla are added. “Cold” custard is made by slowly adding the heated cream into the whisked egg yolks and sugar. The key to a perfect custard dessert of any kind is gentle heat and patience.

Crème brûlée custard is traditionally vanilla-flavored; however, many other options exist. The various custard flavorings include chocolate, cinnamon, coffee, orange liqueur, pumpkin, and fruit.

Crème brûlée should be served in a shallow ramekin. It is rich, so 4-6 ounces is plenty.

You can ensure the custard is cooked to the perfect temperature if you use an instant-read thermometer, which should register 170°F. If you do not have a thermometer, pay attention to the “jiggle.” You want the top and center of the custard to be set but still wobble when moved from side to side. An over-baked custard will have little to no jiggle. You want the custard to have some jiggle because it will firm up more as it cools. The custard should have a glossy surface, even color, and no wet spots.

Cover the top of each cold custard entirely with a thin layer of sugar because any exposed custard will curdle when torched. Swirl the sugar around the ramekin to coat all edges, then shake the ramekin from side to side so it is in an even layer. The topping will turn out best if the sugar is placed in a thin, even layer. It is best to caramelize the sugar at the last minute before serving. When the caramelized sugar on top turns soft, the crème brûlée will lose its charm! Over time, the sugar layer can re-absorb moisture and become soggy again.

A perfect crème brûlée is served warm at the top of the custard (nearest the torching) and cold at the bottom. You can eat crème brûlée the day you make them; however, be sure to chill the custards for at least three hours before caramelizing the sugar. You can store the baked custards without the sugar topping in the fridge for up to four days.

Nowadays, you can find crème brûlée just about anywhere. There are countless ways to dress it up and change the flavor profile, but there's nothing quite like the classic vanilla.

This crème brûlée is a simple but rich, luxuriously smooth, and indulgently creamy dessert that will impress all your guests! You just cannot beat a creamy custard topped with caramelized sugar! It is perfect for making an impressive and elegant dessert ahead of time.

CRÈME BRÛLÉE

(Recipe source: <https://carlsbadcravings.com>)

Custard

2 1/2 cups heavy whipping cream
1/4 teaspoon salt
5 large egg yolks, room temperature
1/2 cup sugar, divided
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Topping

1/4 cup fine or regular white sugar

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

Boil 5 cups of water to use later in the water bath.

Add heavy cream and salt to a medium saucepan. Heat over medium heat until simmering (**do not** let it boil!), remove from heat, and stir in vanilla extract. Set aside to cool for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, place either (8) 4-ounce ramekins, (6) 5-ounce ramekins, or (5) 6-ounce ramekins in a roasting pan or two smaller baking pans and set aside.

Add the egg yolks and 1/2 cup sugar to a mixing bowl. Beat on medium speed for 2 minutes until the egg yolks are pale, fluffy, and thicken.

Using a hand whisk, constantly whisk while slowly drizzling about 1/4 cup warmed heavy cream into the egg mixture. Once completely incorporated, repeat with another 1/4 cup warm cream. When combined, slowly whisk in the remaining cream, constantly whisking. Skim off the foam.

If you notice that the custard is not smooth after adding the cream, you will want to strain it. Place a fine-mesh sieve over a large liquid measuring cup or pitcher to do this.

Evenly divide the custard between the ramekins. Transfer the boiling water to a liquid measuring cup or pitcher.

Transfer the roasting pan with custard to the middle oven rack, and immediately pour the hot water about 3/4 up the sides of the ramekins. (Place the spout on the corner of the roasting pan and slowly pour so water does not splatter onto the custard.)

Bake at 325°F for 25-45 minutes or until the center reaches 170°F. The custard should be barely set, not liquid, but still jiggly. The baking time will depend on the depth of the ramekins; shallow 1-inch ramekins (5-6 ounces) will take closer to 25 minutes, and deep 2-inch ramekins (4 ounces) will take closer to 45 minutes.

Move the custards to a cooling rack and let cool to room temperature (1-2 hours). Cover custards with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 4 hours up to 3 days before adding the sugar topping.

Sugar Topping Prep:

For lukewarm crème brûlée that is being **TORCHED**, remove the custard from the refrigerator 20 minutes before caramelizing the sugar, or wait 20 minutes after

caramelizing to serve. Do not remove the custard from the fridge earlier if oven broiling the sugar.

Dab the tops of the custards with paper towels to remove any condensation. Create the sugar topping by sprinkling 1-2 teaspoons over the tops of each custard. Use less sugar for little ramekins and 2 teaspoons for wide ramekins. Swirl the sugar, then shake the ramekin from side to side until the sugar is evenly distributed and completely covers the custard.

To Torch Brûlée:

Hold the torch about 4 to 5 inches from the sugar, and use a medium power flame. Maintain a constant, slow, side-to-side motion until the sugar melts and becomes golden. Serve crème brûlée immediately for best results (crunchiest topping) or store in the refrigerator for up to 30 minutes before serving.

To Oven Broil Brûlée:

Arrange a rack in the oven in the highest position. Place the ramekins on a baking sheet. Place them on the rack and turn on the broiler (DO NOT PRE-HEAT BROILER).

Broil for 5 to 10 minutes, rotating the ramekins frequently with tongs so that they evenly broil. Watch closely, so they do not burn. Remove them from the oven when the tops are golden brown and bubbling. Serve crème brûlée immediately for best results, or store in the refrigerator for up to 30 minutes before serving.

(Sources: carlsbadcravings.com; gourmet.lovetoknow.com; pastrychefonline.com)