

Creamy Vanilla Custard

Custards are a decadent dessert! They are eaten on their own, layered in cakes, used to fill pies and cream puffs, inserted into donuts, or dolloped onto fruit or desserts. Vanilla custard is a pudding-like dish. While pudding is thickened with starch, an authentic custard uses cornstarch and extra egg yolks, giving it that sweet, rich flavor.

Custard is a dessert usually made with milk, egg yolks, and sugar. Vanilla is one of its most common flavors. It is traditionally cooked slowly in a double boiler or saucepan. This is generally a slow process that requires attention to detail. Depending on how it is cooked, vanilla custard can have a wide range of consistencies.

Customarily, the vanilla custard is cooked in a microwave or over a stove, but it can also be steamed, baked, or made in a pressure cooker. The custard generally needs to be cooked over time and over very low heat because too high of a temperature increase will most likely lead to curdling. It generally begins to set at 158°F, and the custard should usually not exceed 176°F. The eggs and sugar are typically combined, and milk or cream is then mixed into it to prevent the eggs from cooking by themselves. If curdling has not progressed too far, it may sometimes be reversed by removing the mixture from the heat and vigorously stirring or beating. Another option is to pulse the mixture with an immersion blender for about 30 seconds, taking care not to overprocess; otherwise, you will thin the mixture.

Vanilla custard can be flavored using different techniques. Some recipes use vanilla extract, while others use vanilla milk. A traditional flavoring method is to use the actual vanilla pod, which usually involves adding the pod to the milk and then removing it later in the process.

Depending on the dish, vanilla custard can be rich and thick or as thin as a sauce. In the United Kingdom, vanilla custard is usually saucy and is intended to be poured over another dessert. Other recipes call for the custard to be thicker to comprise the main dessert, with fruits or pastry to complement it. These rich versions are usually made with a heavier cream, whereas thin versions call for milk or single cream.

Vanilla custard is far from the only custard flavor available, although it is undoubtedly one of the most common. Chocolate, caramel, or fruit-flavored custards are also popular. Non-sweet custard dishes, such as quiche, are also eaten worldwide.

Custard Secrets

Making custard isn't hard, but it requires a few tips and tricks to ensure you don't end up with a failure.

- Don't stir the sugar into the egg yolks too far in advance.
- In an even and steady stream, pour hot milk into the egg mixture while the mixer is on. This prevents the eggs from cooking. Do not mix or whisk too fast; otherwise, you'll get a frothy mixture.

- Keep an eye on the heat when cooking the custard - too low and it won't thicken; too high and it will become grainy as it cooks the eggs.
- Stir the mixture constantly, making sure to work the spoon over the bottom of the entire pan.
- Strain the custard through a sieve before serving to make sure that it's 100% silky smooth.
- Once cooked, ensure plastic wrap rests on the surface of the custard as it cools. This keeps a skin from forming on the custard.

A silky smooth and luxurious real vanilla custard can be served hot or cold, alone or with many desserts. This classic dessert will never go out of style, so give it a try!

(Sources: www.biggerbolderbaking.com; www.delightedcooking.com; www.foodnetwork.com; www.spendwithpennies.com)