

Crème Brulee

Ingredients:

1/2 vanilla bean

2 cups heavy cream

3 egg yolks

Pinch of salt

1/4 cup plus 4 Tbs. sugar

Directions:

Preheat an oven to 300°F. Have a pot of boiling water ready. Line a baking pan that is 2 to 3 inches deep with a small kitchen towel.

Using a paring knife, split the vanilla bean lengthwise down the middle and scrape the seeds into a 2-quart saucepan. Add the cream, stir to mix and set the pan over medium-low heat. Warm the cream until bubbles form around the edges of the pan and steam begins to rise from the surface. Remove from the heat and set aside to steep, about 15 minutes.

In a large bowl, whisk together the egg yolks, salt and the 1/4 cup sugar until smooth and blended. Gradually add the cream to the egg mixture, whisking until blended. Pour the custard through a fine-mesh sieve set over a bowl. Divide the custard among four 5- or 6-oz. ramekins and place the ramekins in the prepared baking pan. Add boiling water to fill the pan halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Cover the pan loosely with aluminum foil and bake until the custard is just set around the edges, 35 to 40 minutes.

Transfer the ramekins to a wire rack and let cool to room temperature. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or up to 3 days.

Just before serving, sprinkle 1 Tbs. of the sugar evenly over each custard. Using a kitchen torch, melt the sugar according to the manufacturer's instructions. Serve immediately.

Serves 4.

From the Williams-Sonoma Kitchen.