

DOMENICA COOKS

TORTA ALLA CREMA

I came across this recipe while paging through a cookbook I bought in Italy on my last visit, in 2019: *Le Stagioni della Pasticceria: 200 Ricette Dolci e Salate*, by Italian pastry chef Martina Tribioli, with enticing photos by Barbara Torresan. It is, essentially a flan parisien—a buttery pastry shell filled to the brim with *crema pasticcera* (pastry cream) and baked. The flavor is delicate—vanilla and egg—just the sort of gentle flavors that evoke spring. If you'd like to punch it up a bit, you could serve it with a spring compote of rhubarb and strawberries. Or just scatter some berries on top and finish with a shower of confectioners' sugar.

Makes one 8-inch (20-cm) torta, to serve 8

INGREDIENTS

For the base:

1 3/4 cups (225 g) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon fine salt
6 ounces (170 g; 3/4-cup; 1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into cubes
1 large egg yolk
1/4 cup (60 ml) whole milk

For the filling:

3 1/4 cups (750 ml) whole milk
1 to 2 vanilla beans
2 cups + 1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon (220 g) sugar
4 large egg yolks plus 1 whole large egg
10 tablespoons (80 g) cornstarch
Pinch of fine salt
1 cup (250 g) heavy whipping cream

For serving:

Fresh berries and confectioners' sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make the filling: Pour the milk into a saucepan and stir in the sugar. Split the vanilla beans and scrape out the seeds. Drop the seeds into the milk and add the pods. Set the saucepan over

medium to medium-high heat and bring to a boil, stirring to help dissolve the sugar. When the milk comes to a boil, remove from the heat, cover, and let steep for 20 minutes.

2. In a bowl, whisk together the 4 yolks and whole egg with the cornstarch and a pinch of salt. Whisk in the cream.

3. Remove the vanilla pods from the hot milk. Whisk a little of the milk—just a bit—into the bowl with the eggs and cornstarch, taking care to whisk vigorously to prevent the eggs from cooking or curdling. Whisk in another splash of milk, and then another. Once the eggs are tempered, whisk the mixture into the saucepan with the rest of the milk. Return the saucepan to medium heat and cook, whisking constantly, until the mixture thickens to a thick custard and starts to boil. Cook for another minute, stirring vigorously all the while; then remove the saucepan from the heat. Pour the custard into a clean bowl and cover with plastic wrap, pressing the wrap directly onto the surface of the custard. Set aside while you make the base for the tart.

4. Preheat the oven to 350° F (177° C). Butter and flour an 8-inch (22-cm) springform pan.

5. Measure the flour, sugar, and salt into the work bowl of a food processor and pulse to combine. Distribute the butter around the bowl and pulse until the mixture is crumbly, with pea-sized bits of butter throughout. Whisk the egg yolk into the milk and pulse this into the flour and butter until everything begins to clump together. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and pat it into a disk. Roll it out into a large disk about 14 inches in diameter. Drape the dough over the prepared pan and press it into the bottom and up the sides. It should reach the top. Chill the dough in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.

6. Assemble and bake the tart: Use a sturdy whisk or immersion blender to loosen and smooth out the cooled custard—it will, and should, be quite thick and dense. Scrape the custard into the prepared base and smooth out the top. With a paring knife, trim the crust to 1/4 to 1/2 inch above the filling. Set the tart on a baking sheet and bake for 45 to 55 minutes, until the top is well browned in spots. The filling should still be somewhat jiggly; it will set once the tart cools.

7. Set the tart onto a rack and let it cool to room temperature. Then refrigerate it, loosely covered, for several hours, until well chilled. Cut into wedges and serve with fresh berries and a light dusting of confectioners' sugar.