

CHOCOLATE POTS DE CREME

Serves 8

We prefer pots de creme made with 60 percent bittersweet chocolate (our favorite brands are Callebaut Intense Dark Chocolate and Ghirardelli Bittersweet Chocolate), but 70% bittersweet chocolate can also be used. If using a 70% bittersweet chocolate, reduce the amount of chocolate to 8 ounces. An instant read thermometer is the most reliable way to judge when the custard has reached the proper temperature. However, you can also judge the progress of the custard by its thickness. Dip a wooden spoon into the custard and run your finger across the back. the custard is ready when it coats the spoon and a line drawn maintains neat edges. The pots de creme (minus the whipped cream garnish) can be covered tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 3 days.

POTS DE CREME

10 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped fine (see note)
5 large egg yolks
5 tablespoons sugar
1/4 teaspoon table salt
1 1/2 cups heavy cream
3/4 cup half and half
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon instant espresso powder mixed with 1 tablespoon water

WHIPPED CREAM AND GARNISH

1/2 cup heavy cream, chilled
2 teaspoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
Cocoa, for dusting (optional)
Chocolate shavings, for sprinkling (optional)

1. FOR THE POTS DE CREME: Place the chocolate in a medium heatproof bowl; set a fine mesh strainer over the bowl and set aside.
2. Whisk the egg yolks, sugar, and salt together in a medium bowl until combined, then whisk in the heavy cream and half and half. transfer the mixture to a medium saucepan. Cook the mixture over medium low heat, stirring constantly and scraping the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon, until it is thickened and silky and registers 175 to 180 degrees on an instant read thermometer, 8 to 12 minutes. (Do not let the custard overcook or simmer).
3. Immediately pour the custard through the strainer over the chocolate. Let the mixture stand to melt the chocolate, about 5 minutes. Whisk gently until smooth, then whisk in the vanilla and dissolved espresso. Divide the mixture evenly among eight 5 ounce ramekins. Gently tap the ramekins against the counter to remove any air bubbles.
4. Cool the pots de creme to room temperature, then cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until chilled, at least 4 hours or up to 3 days. Before serving, let the pots de creme stand at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes.

5. FOR THE WHIPPED CREAM: Using an electric mixer, whip the cream, sugar, and vanilla on medium low speed until small bubbles form, about 30 seconds. Increase the speed to medium high and continue to whip the mixture until it thickens and forms stiff peaks, about 1 minute. Dollop each pot de creme with about 2 tablespoons of the whipped cream and garnish with cocoa and/or chocolate shavings (if using). Serve.