



Perfect Latin Flan

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 15: Sweet on Custard and Cookies

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Latin American flan should be a dense but creamy custard, but the high-protein canned milks that recipes call for can make it rubbery. It can also bake unevenly, and the caramel tends to stick to the pan rather than pour out when you unmold the custard. To ensure even baking, we bake our flan at a low temperature, covered to keep any skin from forming. We also use a combination of canned and just a little fresh milk to produce a custard with a creamy but sturdy texture. Finally, an overnight rest and adding extra water to the finished caramel allows the release of plenty of caramel sauce.

Serves 8 to 10

This recipe should be made at least one day before serving. We recommend an 8 1/2 by 4 1/2-inch loaf pan for this recipe. If your pan is 9 by 5 inches, begin checking for doneness at 1 hour. You may substitute 2 percent milk for the whole milk, but do not use skim milk. Serve the flan on a platter with a raised rim to contain the liquid caramel.

INGREDIENTS

- 2/3** cup (4 2/3 ounces) sugar
- 2** large eggs plus 5 yolks
- 1** (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
- 1** (12-ounce) can evaporated milk
- 1/2** cup whole milk
- 1 1/2** tablespoons vanilla extract
- 1/2** teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Stir together sugar and 1/4 cup water in medium heavy saucepan until sugar is completely moistened. Bring to boil over medium-high heat, 3 to 5 minutes, and cook, without stirring, until mixture begins to turn golden, another 1 to 2 minutes. Gently swirling pan, continue to cook until sugar is color of peanut butter, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from heat and swirl pan until sugar is reddish-amber and fragrant, 15 to 20 seconds. Carefully swirl in 2 tablespoons warm tap water until incorporated; mixture will bubble and steam. Pour caramel into 8 1/2 by 4 1/2-inch loaf pan; do not scrape out saucepan. Set loaf pan aside.
- 2.** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Line bottom of 13 by 9-inch baking pan with dish towel, folding towel to fit smoothly, and set aside. Bring 2 quarts water to boil.
- 3.** Whisk eggs and yolks in large bowl until combined. Add sweetened condensed milk, evaporated milk, whole milk, vanilla, and salt and whisk until incorporated. Strain mixture through fine-mesh strainer into prepared loaf pan.
- 4.** Cover loaf pan tightly with aluminum foil and place in prepared baking pan. Place baking pan in oven and carefully pour all of boiling water into pan. Bake until center of custard jiggles slightly when shaken and custard registers 180 degrees, 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 hours. Remove foil and leave custard in water bath until loaf pan has cooled completely.

Remove loaf pan from water bath, wrap tightly with plastic wrap, and chill overnight or up to 4 days.

5. To unmold, slide paring knife around edges of pan. Invert serving platter on top of pan and turn pan and platter over. When flan is released, remove loaf pan. Using rubber spatula, scrape residual caramel onto flan. Slice and serve. (Leftover flan may be covered loosely with plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 4 days.)

TECHNIQUE

WHEN GOODNESS COMES (MAINLY) FROM A CAN

The advent of canned milk in Latin America in the late 1800s helped make flan, which was introduced by Spanish conquistadores 300 years earlier, even more popular. When refrigeration became widespread and shelf-stable milk was no longer as necessary, the practice of using the canned stuff stuck. And with good reason: Evaporated and sweetened condensed milks give flan a distinctively thick, luxurious texture and caramelized notes. (In some Latin American countries, this texture has given rise to the alternate name *quesillo*, or little cheesecake). But these milks can also have a negative effect, contributing to a stiff, almost rubbery consistency. This is because they have about twice as much protein as an equivalent amount of fresh dairy, which, when combined with egg proteins in the custard, can create an overly tight structure. Our solution? Add 1/2 cup of fresh milk, which loosens the texture without adding much protein of its own or diluting dairy flavor.

EVAPORATED: This canned milk is made by heating pasteurized fresh milk in two stages to drive off nearly half of its water, which also triggers some Maillard browning. Once sealed in a can, the milk is sterilized to become shelf-stable, a process that triggers more browning and the creation of subtle caramel flavors.



SWEETENED CONDENSED: Adding sucrose or glucose syrups to milk that's been evaporated (and undergone Maillard browning) results in this canned milk. In combination with the lactose naturally present in the milk, these added sugars make up more than 50 percent of its weight, rendering sterilization unnecessary.



TECHNIQUE

DON'T LET THE CARAMEL STICK TO THE PAN

The rich layer of caramel on top of flan is the best part of the dessert—except when most of it sticks to the pan like glue. Adding a couple of tablespoons of water to the syrup after it's caramelized will dissolve some of the sugar and keep it runny. In addition, resting the flan overnight allows moisture from the custard to dissolve more of the sugar, ensuring that most of the caramel will release from the pan (and that what's left in the pan is soft and easy to remove).

CLINGY CARAMEL: To prevent the caramel from sticking to the pan, we add a little water.



