Salted Dark Chocolate Pudding Eleganza

January 19, 2023

This recipe has no business being this easy or this addictive. My favorite NYC bakery, Ovenly, uses it as part of its equally famous Brooklyn Blackout Cake. Using high-quality chocolate and cocoa is what takes this dish from great (bc who doesn't love chocolate pudding?) to ethereal. What's even better, is it doesn't require any egg-tempering or fussy chocolate melting (No eggs! Throw everything into the same pan!). If you want to be fancy, serve it with some whipped crème fraîche. If you want to be EXTRA, sprinkle it with some crumbled Black Sesame Honeycomb, too. Recipes follow. You won't be sorry!

Serves 4

Ingredients:

2   cups whole milk, divided (¼ cup + 1 ¾ cups)
2 ½   tablespoons (21g) cornstarch
½   cup sugar (100g)
2   ounces (57g; about ⅓ cup) dark chocolate, chopped
3   tablespoons (19g) dark Dutch-process cocoa powder
1   teaspoon vanilla extract
¾   teaspoon kosher salt (or sea salt)

Method:

1. In a small bowl, whisk together the ¼ cup of whole milk with the cornstarch until smooth. Set Aside.

2. In a medium saucepan, combine the remaining milk (1 ¾ cups), sugar, dark chocolate, cocoa powder, vanilla extract and salt. Heat over medium-low heat, whisking, until the chocolate is melted.

3. Whisk the cornstarch mixture into the chocolate mixture until fully incorporated.

4. Reduce heat to low, and continue to stir briskly with a wooden spoon or heatproof spatula. The mixture will come to a simmer and will slowly begin to thicken.

5. Continue to cook for 1 to 2 minutes, or until the pudding coats the back of the spoon and slowly drips off. It will be thick and will just be starting to bubble.

6. Remove the pudding from the heat and pour into 4 serving ramekins or bowls. Let cool.

7. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate the pudding until it sets.

*Notes

Use any dark chocolate that is at least 60% cacao or higher–I typically use 70% for this recipe. Dutch-process cocoa powder is like the 'dark chocolate' of cocoa powders–it adds a depth of flavor that you won't get with regular cocoa powder.

Whipped Crème Fraîche
Makes 2 cups

While the addition of confectioner's sugar (which contains a small amount of cornstarch) helps stabilize this whipped topping, do not prepare it more than a few hours before serving. It can absorb flavors from all the things in your refrigerator.

Ingredients:
1   cup heavy whipping cream
2   tablespoons confectioner's sugar
¼-½ cup crème fraîche (or sour cream)
1   teaspoon vanilla extract

Method:
1. Pour very cold cream into the bowl and whip until small bubbles form around the edge. Add confectioner's sugar, crème fraîche, vanilla extract and increase the speed, whipping to desired consistency.

   - **To whip by hand:** Use a very large bowl and a large, balloon-style whisk (if your whisk is too small or has too few wires, it will take much more effort to whip the cream). Whisking vigorously, it should take about 3 to 5 minutes to bring the liquid cream to the proper consistency.

   - **By machine:** Start on low speed until the cream thickens enough not to spatter. Add confectioner's sugar, crème fraîche, and vanilla. Increase the speed to medium-high and continue to whip, stopping the machine when the cream holds soft peaks. Remove the bowl from the electric mixer and finish whipping the cream by hand with a whisk or the whisk attachment.

*Notes
To make ahead, underwhip the cream slightly, cover it well, and refrigerate until needed. Just before serving, remove it from the refrigerator and whisk it briefly to bring out the full body. Conversely, fixing extremely overwhipped cream can be done: Add up to ¼ cup of cold whipping cream and work it in, stirring with a rubber spatula to restore the proper consistency.

Black Sesame Honeycomb
Makes one 9x13" pan

Ingredients:
1   tablespoon baking soda
2   tablespoons toasted black sesame seeds, plus ½ tablespoon for the pan
1   teaspoon flakey sea salt (optional)
1 ½   cups (300g) granulated sugar
¾   cup water
¼   cup light corn syrup
2   tablespoons honey

Method:

1. Line a 9"×13" pan with parchment paper, making sure it goes up the sides of the pan. Lightly spray with cooking spray and sprinkle the bottom evenly with ½ tablespoon of black sesame seeds and 1 teaspoon of flakey sea salt (if using). Measure the baking soda and 2 tablespoons of black sesame seeds into a small dish and set close by.

2. In a large heavy-bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven (4-quart or bigger), combine the sugar, water, corn syrup, and honey. Place the pan over medium-high heat. Gently stir the sugar mixture with a heatproof spatula until dissolved, taking care not to stir any granules up the side of the saucepan. When the mixture begins to boil, stop stirring.

3. Cook the sugar mixture until a candy thermometer (or instant-read thermometer) reads between 305°F and 310°F, about 8 to 12 minutes. Immediately remove from the heat and stir in baking soda and sesame seeds with a heatproof spatula. The baking soda will cause the candy mixture to bubble vigorously, so use caution.

4. Stir the mixture just until it turns a light golden color and is still bubbling. Immediately pour the mixture into the prepared baking pan. It should still be very fluffy, and coat the bottom of the pan with some light coaxing. The candy will shrink and deflate a bit as it cools (especially if the air is humid). Place the pan on a wire rack to cool completely, at least 2 hours.

5. Break the cooled honeycomb candy into pieces, as desired. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to a week.

*Notes
If using an digital instant-read thermometer without a clip for the side of your pan, you may need to carefully tilt the pan, pooling the mixture to one side, to get an accurate temperature reading. To clean the pan, simply let it cool for 10 minutes, then fill with hot water. The sugar will dissolve. If you want thicker candy pieces, make the recipe in an 8"x8" square pan.