

MAPLE CRÈME BRÛLÉE

(inspired by a recipe from Jacques Torres)

1 cup heavy cream
1 cup half-and-half
1/2 vanilla bean
1 whole egg
4 egg yolks
1/4 cup sugar
7 tablespoons maple syrup
Turbinado sugar to caramelize the top

Heat the oven to 325 F. Pour the heavy cream and half-and-half into a saucepan and place over medium heat. Slice the vanilla bean in half lengthwise, and scrape the seeds from the skin, adding them to the simmering cream, together with the leftover bean.

Scald the cream by heating it until bubbles start to form around the edge of the pan. Remove from the heat. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the whole egg, egg yolks, maple syrup and sugar until well blended. Continue to whisk while slowly pouring the hot cream into the egg mixture and whisk until the mixture is smooth and homogenous in color. Pour the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve to remove the vanilla bean pieces and any pieces of cooked egg.

Add the custard to ramekins filling them almost to the top. Bake in the heated oven inside a large baking pan with hot water coming up halfway up the sides of the molds. Bake for approximately 40 minutes. Check after 35 minutes, the custard should tremble slightly when shaken, forming a little wave in the center of the ramekin, but not on the edges. Remove the molds from the water bath and place on a cooling rack for 30 minutes. Then refrigerate for 2 hours (or for to 3 days) before serving.

At serving time, sprinkle each custard homogeneously with *turbinado* (or *demerara*) sugar, and caramelize with a torch. Alternatively, you can broil the surface, but be very careful not to melt the custard underneath the sugar crust. You can serve right away or refrigerate again.