



THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

A FOOD BLOG

Banana Cream Pie (completely rewritten and slightly tweaked from Tartine's cookbook)

Full disclosure:

- 1) The pastry cream pretty much always curdles for me before it boils, but I just pour it into the strainer set over a bowl, whisk like crazy and strain it, and it always ends up smooth and delicious.
- 2) Working with small amounts of caramel can be tricky, but I had no problems with these quantities. If you see crystals forming when the sugar mixture is bubbling, discard those ingredients and start over. If you're worried about it working right, you might want to make twice the amount listed here and save half of it for another use.
- 3) I'm too lazy to set up a makeshift double boiler for 1 ounce of chocolate and I'm biased against microwaves for some reason, so I just melt the chocolate in a very small saucepan over low heat while stirring constantly.

Pastry cream:

2 cups whole milk
¼ teaspoon salt
½ vanilla bean, cut in half and seeds scraped out
4 tablespoons cornstarch
4 ounces (½ cup + 1 tablespoon) granulated sugar
2 large eggs
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 8 cubes

Caramel:

5 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 tablespoon water
½ tablespoon light corn syrup
pinch salt
¼ teaspoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
1 tablespoon butter, cut into four pieces

Whipped cream:

1 cup heavy cream, cold
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Assembly:

1 pie crust for single-crust 9-inch pie, fully baked and cooled
1 ounce chocolate, finely chopped
3 bananas, sliced ¼-inch thick

1. For the pastry cream: Pour a bit of water into a medium saucepan and dump it out. I know it sounds strange, but wetting the bottom of the pot before adding the milk really helps keep the milk from forming a browned layer on the bottom. Add the milk, salt, and vanilla seeds to the pot and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Meanwhile, whisk together the sugar and cornstarch in a medium bowl, then whisk in the eggs. When the milk boils, pour just a bit of it into the egg mixture, whisking constantly. Keep whisking and very gradually add the rest of the milk to the egg mixture. Pour the mixture back into the pot and whisk constantly over medium heat

until the mixture thickens and just starts to boil; it will only take a few minutes (see note #1). Quickly pour the pastry cream into a fine-mesh strainer set over a medium bowl (I use the same bowl I originally mixed everything in). Use a rubber spatula to push the pastry cream through the strainer. Let the pastry cream cool for a few minutes, occasionally stirring it, and then mix in the butter, 2 cubes at a time. Press plastic wrap directly on the surface of the pastry cream and refrigerate it until completely chilled, 3-4 hours or overnight.

2. For the caramel: Pour the sugar into the center of a tall, heavy-bottomed medium saucepan (see note #2). Carefully pour the water and corn syrup over the sugar. Gently stir the mixture with a clean spatula. Place the saucepan over medium heat and bring the mixture to a boil. Before it boils, you can stir it a bit if it seems to be heating unevenly and the sugar isn't dissolving, but once it starts to boil, stop stirring. You can gently swirl the pan if it seems to be cooking unevenly. Once the mixture becomes a light amber color, remove it from the heat and add the cream. It will bubble up a lot, so stand back. Give it a few seconds to die down, then whisk the cream into the caramel. Add the vanilla extract and lemon juice, then stir in the butter one cube at a time. Pour the caramel into a small dish.

3. Pour about an inch of water into a small saucepan and bring to a simmer (see note #3). Place the chocolate in a small heatproof bowl, place the bowl over the simmering water, and heat, stirring pretty often, until the chocolate is melted. Pour the chocolate into the cooled crust and use a pastry brush to spread it evenly. Set the chocolate aside to set for a few minutes.

4. For the whipped cream: Place the mixer bowl and whisk attachment (or beaters for a handheld mixer) in the freezer for at least 10 minutes. When the bowl is cold, add the cream and beat at high speed until soft peaks form. Add the sugar and vanilla and continue beating at high speed until firm peaks form.

5. Pour the warm-not-hot caramel over the chocolate and spread it fairly evenly. Spread half the pastry cream over the caramel, then arrange half of the banana slices over the pastry cream. Repeat with the remaining pastry cream and bananas. Spread the whipped cream over the bananas. Refrigerate the pie at least 4 hours or overnight, until set.