



Chocolate Cherry Bread Pudding

Serves 8

Croissants are a breakfast and lunch classic, especially when entertaining a crowd. You can transform your buttery, airy leftovers into an inspired holiday dessert laced with the flavor of dark, bittersweet chocolate and dried cherries. To add another dimension of flavor, re-hydrate the cherries in Port before cooking in the bread pudding.

Ingredients:

6 large croissants
8 ounces high quality dark (bittersweet) chocolate (65% or higher cacao content)
3/4 cup dried tart cherries
1/2 - 1/3 cup tawny port
3/4 cup sugar
2 cups whole milk
1 1/4 cups heavy cream
1 vanilla bean
Generous pinch of salt
3 eggs
2 tablespoons butter
Fresh mint leaves, for garnish

Preparation:

Prepare the bread for the pudding: Coarsely chop or tear the each croissant into bite size pieces. Dry at room temperature overnight, or dry in a 350°F oven tossing occasionally, about 15 minutes.

Re-hydrate the dried cherries: Combine cherries and Port in heavy small saucepan. Bring to simmer over medium heat. Remove from heat; let stand until cherries swell, about 15 minutes. Drain the port from the cherries through a sieve into a small bowl; reserve for chocolate sauce. Coarsely chop the cherries. Set aside.

Prepare the custard cream. Combine the sugar, milk, 1 cup of cream, and salt in a heavy medium saucepan and set over medium heat. Cut the vanilla bean in half and then slice each half lengthwise. Remove the pulp from the bean and place both the pulp and the bean into the milk mixture. Whisk to dissolve the sugar and combine the ingredients. When steam begins to rise from the pan and small bubbles begin to appear around the edge of the mixture, remove the pan from the heat. Allow to cool. Remove and discard the vanilla bean. Set aside.

While the milk mixture is cooling, coarsely chop the chocolate. Then butter a 1 1/2 quart baking dish.

Prepare the bread pudding: Spread half of the croissant pieces in the bottom of the baking dish. Sprinkle the chopped chocolate on top of the croissant; then the chopped cherries. Top the remaining mixture with the remaining croissant pieces.

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In a medium mixing bowl whisk the eggs to combine. Add the cooled milk mixture to the eggs in a slow steady stream while whisking constantly to combine.

Pour the milk and egg mixture slowly over the bread. Use the back of a spatula to press the croissant into the liquid to help absorb the liquid. Cover and chill about 2 hours, or as long as overnight. Remove pudding from the refrigerator while oven is preheating.

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Cut the remaining butter into small pieces and place about the top of the prepared pudding. Bake pudding until pudding is slightly raised and light golden in color, about 45 minutes.

Remove pudding and allow to cool about 15-20 minutes. Serve pudding warm or at room temperature with the Chocolate Port Sauce. Garnish with fresh mint.

To Serve:

While pudding is resting, prepare the ***Chocolate Port Sauce:***

Coarsely chop about 4 ounces of bittersweet (dark) chocolate and place in a small heat proof bowl over a saucepan of simmering water. Allow to melt. Whisk in about 1/4 cup of cream and about 1/4 of the re-hydrated cherry liquid, to taste.

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