

Chocolate Pots de Crèmes

Valentine's Day. It happens every year, like it or not. No matter your feelings on the subject, we think it's a pretty good idea to include these dense, deeply chocolaty treats on the menu. It may seem like gilding the lily, but they benefit from the contrast of the soft whipped cream. So whether you're seeking romance or a place to hide your sorrows, these will do the trick.

Ingredients

8 ounces (best-quality) semi-sweet chocolate, finely chopped
1/2 teaspoon instant espresso powder
5 large egg yolks
3 tablespoons sugar
pinch of salt
2 cups half-and-half
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup lightly sweetened whipped cream, for serving
chocolate shavings, grated on fine microplane, for serving

Special Equipment

whisk
fine-mesh strainer
six 4-ounce ramekins, or similar size glass or ceramic vessels

Put the chocolate and espresso powder into a large bowl and set a fine-mesh strainer over the bowl.

In a separate medium bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the sugar and salt until light and slightly paler in color.

Heat the half-and-half in a small saucepan over medium heat just until it begins to steam and small bubbles form at the edges. Stream the hot liquid into the egg yolks while constantly whisking. Pour the mixture back into the pot and reduce the heat to medium-low. Cook, stirring constantly and scraping the bottom with a rubber spatula, until the custard is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon (See Cook's Note). Do not boil.

Pour the custard through the strainer over the chocolate in the bowl, then remove the strainer. Let chocolate and custard sit for 1 minute. Add vanilla and stir until the chocolate has melted and the mixture is smooth and evenly combined. Pour into six 4-ounce ramekins. Cover the

surfaces lightly with plastic wrap and chill for at least 2 hours and up to overnight. Serve with a dollop of fresh whipped cream and sprinkled with chocolate shavings.

Cook's Note: The custard has thickened enough when it coats the back of a spoon and a finger drawn across it leaves a clean trail.

total time: 2 hours 20 minutes

active prep: 20 minutes

serves: 6

difficulty: moderate