

Poached Pears & Zabaglione

Pears, already floral and honeyed, soften and turn gem-like in a gentle poach of spiced red wine. Zabaglione — nothing more than the Italian name for a sweet, boozy whipped custard that's light as air — pools beneath the fruit in the bowl like melted silk. There's a reason this is a classic dessert.

Ingredients

for the pears

1 bottle inexpensive, medium dry red wine (such as Montepulciano)
1½ cups sugar
1 cup water
Seeds from 1 vanilla bean pod
1 cinnamon stick
5 black peppercorns
3 juniper berries
1 star anise
1 orange
4 firm but ripe Bosc pears

for the zabaglione

4 egg yolks
1/3 cup sugar
1/3 cup Marsala wine
Pinch of salt

special equipment

melon baller or serrated grapefruit spoon

Directions

for the pears

Using the lid from a medium, heavy bottomed saucepan as a guide, cut a round of parchment paper.

In that saucepan, combine the wine, sugar, water and spices. Use a peeler to peel 2 strips of zest from the orange. Add the zest to the pot, then juice the orange and add that as well. Bring the mixture to a simmer, stirring occasionally until the sugar dissolves.

In the meantime, peel the pears, leaving the stems intact. Slice 1/4-inch from the bottom of each to create a flat bottom so pears will stand upright when serving. Working from the bottom of the pear, use a melon baller or grapefruit spoon to scoop out the core and seeds.

Add the pears, laying them on their sides, to the simmering liquid and cover with the round of parchment. Simmer for 30-40 minutes, until pears are easily pierced with a knife, rotating every 10 minutes or so. (Total poaching time will depend on the ripeness of your pears.) When they're done, let the pears cool in the poaching liquid. (See Cook's Note). When they reach room temperature, remove them and set aside. Return the poaching liquid to a simmer and reduce by 2/3, until it reaches a syrupy consistency (about 30 minutes).

for the zabaglione

Add all ingredients to a medium bowl that will fit over a pot of simmering water for a double boiler. Cook, whisking constantly, until the mixture is very thick and light in color, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature before serving.

To plate, add about 1/4 cup of the zabaglione to a serving dish. Top with a pear and a drizzle of the reduced poaching liquid.

Cook's Notes

Pears can be poached 1 day ahead of time, cooled, then refrigerated in the poaching liquid. When ready to serve, remove pears and allow to come to room temperature while reducing poaching liquid to a syrup.

total time: 70 minutes

active prep: 30 minutes

serves: 4

difficulty: *easy*