

Anson Mills

1922-C Gervais Street - Columbia, South Carolina 29201 • tel. (803) 467-4122 • sales@AnsonMills.com

Grits Praline and Brown Butter Ice Cream

Time: 1 hour working time, 4 hours or overnight to chill the base, 40 to 50 minutes to churn, and a couple of hours to temper in the freezer

“Decadent” isn’t a word we throw around lightly or with much enthusiasm, but it is the obvious starting place for descriptions of this ice cream. This ice cream feels as luxurious in your mouth as a *charmeuse robe* drawn around your shoulders, as a cashmere scarf falling on your neck, as the finest lotion between your fingertips. And it’s riddled with grits!

The idea of experiencing the chewy, supple texture of cooked grits in a creamy, frozen custard gripped us like a fever. We thought corn; we thought butter. We thought buttery confections: butterscotch, caramel, toffee. All were alluring. We made butterscotch ice cream and caramel ice cream and turned the grits loose in each.

The results were tasty but inelegant. We made praline and toffee candy and plied each with grits, occasioning other problems: the hot sugar either fried the grits or the grits caused the butter to run out of the toffee. But in that errant, fleeing butter came a revelation: the flavor of the brown butter drove us wilder than anything else. And so we slid it surreptitiously into the ice cream base, leaving the grits to their own devices. The brown butter gave the ice cream a gorgeous mousseline sheen that comes only when cooked egg yolks encounter melted butter, and a delicate, unforgettable flavor—more guileless and innocent than either butterscotch *or* caramel. (The organic sweet Jersey cream we got from our favorite farm stand in Shaftsbury Vermont didn’t hurt either.)

As for the grits, we dried them gently in the oven and pressed them into warm poured caramel and crushed the gravel when it cooled. We stirred it into the frozen base. You know how good caramel popcorn can be? That’s what this is like.

Equipment Mise en Place

For the ice cream base you will need a large mixing bowl; 3 quarts of ice; a fine conical strainer; small heavy-bottomed saucepan; a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan; a medium mixing bowl; a whisk; an instant-read thermometer; a 4-cup glass measure or pitcher; and an ice cream maker.

For the praline you will need a fine mesh strainer; a tea strainer; a small saucepan; and a mesh colander to cook the grits; and a baking sheet to dry them. You’ll also need a heavy-bottomed medium saucepan; a small, nonstick baking mat such as a Silpat, or a sheet pan lined with parchment; a small offset spatula; and a metal bench knife.

Cooking Remarks

Okay, shoot us right now. We call for vanilla extract instead of vanilla bean in this instance. Go ahead! But frankly, we tried them both, and, guess what? The extract was so far superior to the bean, it wasn’t even funny. We don’t know why, it just was.

Make the ice cream base before the praline. If you have time, make it a full day ahead to deep chill the base. Freeze the base until the machine whines to a stop, then add the crushed praline and re-freeze. The sugar puts some heat on the freeze and tries to thaw it, but persuade your machine to soldier on. When the ice cream is set, transfer it to your freezer and temper it for a few hours before serving.

This base is small, by volume, about 3 cups, not enough to overwhelm any ice cream maker.

And speaking of the base, custards can be tricky. We think cooks tend to undercook custards, not overcook them. Cooking the yolks in custard properly will have a powerful influence on the ice cream’s ultimate consistency.

Do use an instant read thermometer and let it climb to

Ingredients

For the ice cream:

4 tablespoons (2 ounces) European-style unsalted butter

1/3 cup (2.3 ounces) granulated sugar

1/8 teaspoon fine sea salt

6 large egg yolks

1 cup heavy cream

1 cup whole milk

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

For the praline:

1/3 cup (2 ounces) Anson Mills Antebellum Coarse

Yellow or White Grits

1/2 cup (3.5 ounces) granulated sugar

Directions

1. *Make the custard base:* Set a large bowl into a sink or basin filled with lots of ice cubes and cold water. Have a fine conical strainer nearby. Melt the butter in a small saucepan over low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon to scrape the browning milk solids back into the butter, until the butter is the color of a filbert in the shell and the kitchen smells miraculous, about 3 minutes. Pull the pan off the heat and set it aside. Pour the cream and milk into a medium saucepan set over medium-high heat. Whisk the egg yolks and sugar together in a medium bowl. Drizzle the hot butter cautiously into the yolk and sugar mixture a little at a time, whisking well as you do. When the cream is just shy of a simmer, pull the saucepan off the burner and pour half the hot cream into the yolk mixture. Whisk well. Add the remaining cream and whisk well. Pour everything back into the saucepan, and return the saucepan to the burner. Reduce the heat to medium and stir with a heat proof spatula or wooden spoon until the cream thickens and the temperature hovers right around 180 degrees Fahrenheit, about a minute. Do not let the temperature go over 180! Pour the custard immediately through a fine conical strainer into the bowl set in the ice bath. Stir to cool. Add the vanilla and chill completely, stirring from time to time. Remove the bowl from the ice bath and transfer the custard to a 4-cup glass measure or pitcher. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until you're ready to make the ice cream, at least 4 hours or overnight.

around 180 degrees. Don't stop stirring, though!

As for the caramel, we must tell you that although we don't enjoy baking on Silpat mats, when it comes to confection work, they rule. The silicone and fiberglass surface allows the caramel to remain supple longer than glass or metal. So you can pick the mat up and let the caramel run into a thin, beautiful sheet before it seizes up and hardens forever. You've got more time to press the grits into the caramel, too.

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2. *Cook the grits:* Turn the grits into a fine strainer set over a bowl. Use your fingers to rub the finer particles through the strainer, leaving the large pieces behind--try to sift all the fine particles out. Measure the large-particle grits into a ¼-cup dry measuring cup or weigh out 1.5 ounces and turn them into a bowl. (Mix the leftover large grits and the finer, sifted grits back into bag.) Turn the grits into a small heavy-bottomed saucepan and cover with 2 ½ cups spring or filtered water. Stir once. Allow the grits to settle a full minute, tilt the vessel, and skim off and discard the chaff and hulls using a fine tea strainer. Set the saucepan over medium heat and bring to a simmer, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. Reduce the heat to low and simmer the grits gently, stirring frequently, until they have swollen and are quite soft, about 25 minutes. Add a teaspoon of fine sea salt midway through the cooking process. Strain the grits through a fine-screened colander set over the sink and rinse them well with cool water. Shake well to dry. Turn the grits onto a sheet pan, spread them out and dry them in a 200-degree oven (no need to pre-heat) for 30 minutes or so, turning 3 or 4 times with a spatula to evaporate water from the surface. Do not let them color or become super-crunchy.

3. *Make the praline:* Toward the end of the grits drying process line a sheet pan with parchment paper or have a nonstick baking mat at the ready. Pour the sugar into a clean, dry, heavy-bottomed medium saucepan. Turn the heat to medium-high and allow the sugar to melt without stirring. When a band of colored sugar (caramel) appears bubbling along the edge of the saucepan begin to stir the white, raw sugar on the top into the melted caramel base with a fork. Reduce the heat to medium-low and continue stirring from time to time to incorporate the unmelted sugar into the caramel. When the sugar has completely melted, the caramel will have a glassy, deep amber sheen and show no granularity. Pour the caramel onto the baking mat or sheet pan, tilting the surface so the caramel runs as thinly as possible. Remove the grits from the oven, sprinkle them onto the surface of the caramel and use a small offset spatula to press the grits into the carame. Cool. Some of the grits will not stick to the caramel, and residual liquid from the grits may produce a few drops of caramel syrup on the praline. This does not matter. Set the praline aside and cool completely.

4. *Make the ice cream:* Pour the chilled custard base into the canister of your ice cream maker and churn until the ice cream maker indicates the cream is frozen, about 50 minutes. While the ice cream is freezing, loosen the praline from the baking mat or glass dish and chop it finely with a metal bench knife. Stir the praline into the ice cream base and refreeze the ice cream. When the cream has set, remove the canister from the ice cream maker and place it in the freezer to temper the ice cream, 2 or 3 hours more.

Makes about a quart