

Carolina Gold Rice Pudding

Time: 4 hours or overnight to soak the rice, 15 or 20 minutes to cook it, and about 20 minutes to prepare the pudding

Created in the style of the French classic, *riz à l'Impératrice*, this ethereal dessert has none of the stodgy, pitted egginess of baked rice puddings, and it doesn't slump in a dish like a starchy-sweet cafeteria comeback either. Rather, meltingly soft individual grains succumb to a chilled custard base lightened with chantilly whipped cream—in fashion terms, pure silk charmeuse. Impossibly light, impossibly rich, irresistible.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a 5 1/2-cup electric rice cooker and a heavy-bottomed medium saucepan (or two medium saucepans), a wooden spoon, one medium and two large mixing bowls, a fine stainless strainer, an electric mixer or balloon whisk to whip the cream, a rubber spatula, and a quart of ice cubes to chill the pudding.

Ingredients

For the rice:

3/4 cup (5.7 ounces) Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice

1 1/2 cups whole milk

1/2 cup spring or filtered water

1/4 cup (1.75 ounces) granulated sugar

1/8 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt

2 tablespoons currants (optional)

For the custard:

4 large egg yolks

1/4 cup (1.75 ounces) granulated sugar

1 1/2 cups whole milk

1/8 teaspoon fine sea salt

1/2 vanilla bean, split in half lengthwise and pulp scraped, or

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

To finish:

3/4 cup unsweetened heavy cream, lightly whipped

Cooking Remarks

This recipe comes together in a short series of steps: cook the rice in milk and sugar, make a stirred custard or crème anglaise, combine the two, fold in whipped cream. The rice cooks best when the pot is covered, but the milk has a powerful urge to boil over. Best solution: a standard Asian rice cooker. These cookers work as well as a double boiler when it comes to insulation and the pot insert is nonstick. Cover the insert until the rice comes to a boil, then vent the rising steam by pulling the lid slightly off center. As the rice absorbs the milk, close the lid completely. If you don't have a rice cooker, use a saucepan, but keep your eye on it.

Directions

1. For the rice: Place the rice, milk, and water in an electric 5 1/2-cup rice cooker insert or medium heavy-bottomed saucepan and stir once. Cover and refrigerate 4 hours or overnight.

2. Add the sugar, cinnamon, and salt to the milk and rice. *If you are using an electric cooker,* stir the mixture, cover the insert, lower it onto the coil, and flip the steamer to the "on" position. When the milk boils move the lid slightly off center until the rice has absorbed some of the milk. Replace the lid and cook, stirring occasionally. When the cooker indicates the rice is done, sprinkle the currants on top of the hot rice to plump them and replace the lid. Begin step 3. *If you are using a saucepan,* set it over medium-high heat, cover most of the way, and bring the liquid to a simmer, stirring once or twice. Reduce the heat to low and cook gently, stirring from time to time, until the rice has absorbed the milk, about 15 minutes. Remove the saucepan from the heat, sprinkle the currants on the rice, and replace the lid.

3. For the custard: Whisk the egg yolks and sugar together in a medium bowl. Bring the milk, salt, and vanilla bean, if using, to a simmer in a medium saucepan. Add a ladle of hot milk to the yolk mixture and whisk to warm the yolks. Pour the yolks back into the simmering milk and stir the custard over low heat with a wooden spoon until the sauce thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon, about 5 minutes. Do not boil. Remove from the heat and pour the sauce immediately through a fine stainless strainer into a large mixing bowl. Add the vanilla extract, if using. Stir in the cooked rice. (If the rice is sticky, use a whisk to separate the grains in the sauce.) Place the mixing bowl over a larger bowl filled with ice and water and stir the pudding until it is cold.

4. To finish: Fold in the whipped cream. Cover and chill until ready to serve. (You may spoon the pudding into wine glasses first before chilling.)

Serves 6 to 8