



Pumpkin Cognac Crème Brûlée

Makes 8 servings

Ingredients:

3 cups	whipping cream
6	large egg yolks
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons	sugar, plus more for brûlée topping
1/2 cup plus 3 tablespoons	canned pumpkin
1/4 teaspoon	kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon	ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon	ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon	ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon	ground cloves
1/4 teaspoon	freshly ground pepper
1 teaspoon	vanilla
2 tablespoons	cognac (substitute rum or brandy, if desired)

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325°. Place 8 (6-ounce) ramekins or custard cups in a heavy-duty roasting pan.

Heat whipping cream to just under a simmer in a medium saucepan over medium heat (I usually do this in a double boiler to ensure that the cream doesn't scald). Remove from heat.

Combine remaining ingredients in a large mixing bowl, whisking together just until smooth. Gradually whisk in hot cream. It's important to do this gradually, you don't want the cream to curdle or the egg yolks to cook into lumps. Pour mixture through a

wire-mesh strainer into a pitcher.

Divide custard evenly among ramekins. Fill pan with hot water to a depth of 1 inch. Cover with aluminum foil, crimping around edges of pan. Bake 45 to 50 minutes or until custard is barely set and jiggles when shaken. Remove ramekins from water bath, let cool, and chill 3 hours or up to 3 days. Make sure they're cooled completely before putting them in the fridge – they'll form condensation over they're still a tad warm. If they do form condensation, not to worry, just pat them lightly with a paper towel to absorb the moisture before the next step.

Remove from refrigerator. Sprinkle surface of each custard evenly with 1 scant tablespoon sugar. Caramelize sugar with a kitchen blowtorch, moving flame quickly back and forth across custard (this is the fun part!). Let cool 2 to 3 minutes before serving.

Note: If you don't have a kitchen blowtorch, broil 3 inches from heat 2 to 3 minutes or until sugar caramelizes. Watch it closely, though, it can burn and you don't want the custard to have a chance to heat up, either.

For a nonalcoholic version of this dish, simply leave out the cognac; you'll lose depth of flavor, but the custard will cook the same. Do not substitute pie filling for the canned pumpkin and spices. Prep: 15 minutes; Bake: 45 minutes; Chill: 3 hours.