crème caramel di albicocche

APRICOT CRÊME CARAMEL

2 hours plus chilling | 6 servings

- **1 to 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, for greasing cutter**
- **1¾ cups sugar**
- **1 whole star anise pod**
- **1½ cups whole milk**
- **2 large eggs**
- **3 large egg yolks**
- **Fine sea salt**
- **¼ pound fresh apricots, cut into ¼-inch pieces plus 3 fresh whole apricots**
- **2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: 6 (6-ounce) ramekins, a 2-inch round cookie cutter

Heat oven to 300°.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Lightly butter the inside of a 2-inch round cookie cutter. In a small saucepan, combine 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar and ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon water; cook over low heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Increase heat to medium-high and, without stirring, boil mixture until it becomes a golden brown caramel, about 6 minutes; remove from heat.

Place prepared cookie cutter on prepared baking sheet. Drizzle 1 teaspoon caramel into cutter; working quickly and holding cutter in place with 1 hand, gently rotate baking sheet to spread caramel. Leave cutter in place until caramel is set, about 10 seconds. Lift cutter and repeat to make 12 discs, buttering cutter as necessary (as you work, caramel will stiffen; gently reheat over low heat to keep fluid, as necessary); set aside discs (discs can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 4 days). Divide remaining caramel evenly among ramekins, turning ramekins to coat bottoms.

Using the flat side of a chefs knife, or a mallet, gently crush star anise pod and remove seeds; reserve seeds (save pod for another use). In a medium saucepan, combine milk, ½ cup sugar and seeds. Heat mixture just to a boil, then remove from heat and let stand 10 minutes. Strain mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a medium bowl; discard seeds.

In a small bowl lightly beat together eggs, egg yolks and pinch salt; whisk egg mixture into milk mixture.

Combine apricot pieces, remaining 2 tablespoons sugar and lemon juice in a small skillet. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and cook until apricots are very soft, about 5 minutes. Transfer mixture to the bowl of a food processor and purée until smooth, then strain through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl, pressing on and discarding solids. Add milk mixture and whisk custard to combine.

Halve and pit remaining 3 apricots. Place 1 apricot half, cut-side up, in each ramekin, then divide custard among ramekins. Arrange ramekins in roasting pan or 9- x 13-inch baking dish.

Carefully add enough hot water to pan to reach halfway up sides of ramekins. Cover baking dish with foil, then, using a paring knife, make a few slits in foil. Bake in middle of oven until custard is just set (but still trembles slightly in center), 50 minutes to 1 hour. Run a thin knife around side of each ramekin to loosen custard, then transfer ramekins to a rack and cool. Refrigerate, loosely covered, at least 2 hours or up to 2 days.

To unmold, place ramekins in a large skillet; add water to skillet to come up ¼ inch. Bring water to a gentle simmer; simmer 4 minutes, then remove from heat. Remove ramekins from skillet. Invert plates over ramekins and invert custards onto plates. Serve with caramel discs.

bavarese di albicocche

APRICOT BAVARIAN CREAM

45 minutes plus chilling | 4 servings

BAVARIAN CREAM

- **6 tablespoons plus ½ teaspoon sugar**
- **½ pound fresh apricots, cut into ½-inch pieces**
- **1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice**
- **1 (¼-ounce) envelope gelatin**
- **1 cup heavy cream**

SAUCE

- **2 fresh medium apricots**
- **2½ tablespoons Greek yogurt**
- **1½ teaspoons fresh lemon juice**
- **2 tablespoons confectioners sugar**

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: 4 (5-ounce) serving glasses or cups

FOR BAVARIAN CREAM: In a medium saucepan, combine 6 tablespoons sugar and 6 tablespoons water; bring mixture to a boil, then add apricots and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add lemon juice and cook 1 minute more. Transfer mixture to a blender and purée until smooth.

Fill a large bowl ⅓ full with ice and cold water. In a medium bowl, combine gelatin and 2 tablespoons water. Force apricot mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into bowl with gelatin; whisk thoroughly to combine. Set bowl into prepared ice water. Stir apricot mixture constantly for 5 minutes, then continue to stir occasionally, until mixture is chilled and thickened, about 5 minutes more.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat cream and remaining ½ teaspoon sugar on medium-high speed until doubled in volume and thickened, about 45 seconds. Gently but thoroughly fold thickened cream into apricot mixture, then divide among serving glasses or cups and chill until set, about 1 hour (Bavarian Cream can be made up to 1 day ahead, and refrigerated, covered, until ready to serve).

FOR SAUCE: Cut 1 apricot into ½-inch pieces. From remaining apricot, cut 4 slices for garnish; set slices aside, then cut remaining portion into ½-inch pieces. In a food processor, combine apricot pieces, yogurt, lemon juice and confectioners sugar; pureé until smooth. Just before serving, top each serving of Bavarian Cream with apricot pureé and slices.

liquore di albicocche

APRICOT LIQUEUR

15 minutes plus standing | makes 750 milliliters

- **2¼ cups vodka (preferably 80 proof)**
- **¾ pound fresh apricots, roughly chopped**
- **1 vanilla bean**
- **1 cup sugar**
- **1 cup water**

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: cheesecloth, a fine-mesh sieve, 1 empty clean 750-ml bottle with cap, or jar with lid

In a large bowl combine vodka, apricots and vanilla bean. Cover and let stand at room temperature for 36 hours. Remove vanilla bean (bean can be rinsed, dried and reserved for another use).

Combine sugar and 1 cup water in a medium saucepan; bring to a simmer, stirring to dissolve sugar. Remove simple syrup from heat and let cool to room temperature, then add to vodka mixture.

Line a fine-mesh sieve with cheesecloth; strain vodka mixture through prepared sieve into a large bowl, then transfer into 750-ml bottle with cap, or jar with lid. Refrigerate, covered, 2 weeks before serving. Serve liqueur chilled.

albicocche all'agro

PICKLED APRICOTS

1 hour plus processing | makes 3 (8-ounce) jars

- **2⅓ pounds fresh apricots**
- **4 cups white wine vinegar (7 % acidity)**
- **¾ cup sugar**
- **2 tablespoons coarse sea salt**
- **3 bay leaves**

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: 3 (8-ounce) canning jars with lids and screw bands; a boiling-water canner or an 8- to 10-quart deep pot; tongs; ladle; an instant-read thermometer; cheesecloth

Wash jars, lids and screw bands in hot, soapy water, then rinse well. Dry screw bands. Put jars on a rack in canner or deep pot and add enough water to cover by 2 inches. Put tongs and ladle into pot, making sure lower 5 inches of tools are submerged in the water. Bring to a boil and boil for 10 minutes (see note). Remove from heat, leaving jars in water. In a small saucepan, heat lids in water to cover by 2 inches until thermometer registers 180° (do not let boil). Remove from heat, leaving lids in water. Keep jars and lids submerged in hot water, covered, until ready to use.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Fill a large bowl ⅓ full with ice and cold water. Blanch apricots 30 seconds in boiling water then, using a slotted spoon, transfer to prepared ice bath. Drain apricots, then peel, halve and pit.

In a large saucepan, combine vinegar, sugar, salt and bay leaves; bring to a boil and cook 10 minutes. Add apricots and cook at a gentle simmer until apricots are tender but still firm, about 3 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer apricots to a paper-towel-lined plate to drain and cool.

Line a fine-mesh sieve with cheesecloth; strain cooking liquid through prepared sieve into a large bowl. Return liquid to saucepan, bring to a full boil, then remove from heat.

Drain jars upside down on a clean kitchen towel 1 minute, then invert. Divide apricots among jars and cover with hot liquid, leaving ½ inch of space at top. Discard any excess liquid. Wipe off rims of filled jars with a clean damp kitchen towel, then top with lids and screw on "finger tight" (just screwed on with your fingertips, not cranked tight with your palm). Put sealed jars on rack in canner or pot and add enough water to cover by 2 inches. Bring to a boil, covered, then boil 20 minutes. With tongs, transfer jars to a towel-lined surface to cool. Jars will seal; if you hear a ping, it signals that vacuum formed at the top of cooling pickles has made lid concave (some jars make the sound after you remove them from water, and others in same batch may take a few hours); the important thing is for jars to eventually have concave lids.

After jars have cooled 12 to 24 hours, press center of each lid to check that it's concave, then remove screw band and lift jar by lid with your fingertips. If lid stays put, it has a good seal. Replace screw band. Put any jars that are not filled up to ½ inch from top, or any that haven't sealed properly, in the refrigerator and use them first. Let pickles stand in a cool, dark place at least 2 months before eating. Pickles can be stored for up to 1 year.

NOTE: *Add 1 minute of processing time (both to sterilization and final processing) for every 1,000 feet above sea level.*

marmellata di albicocche con le mandorle

APRICOT AND ALMOND MARMALADE

1 hour plus processing | makes 5 (8-ounce) jars

- **2¼ pounds fresh apricots**
- **1 cup unsalted roasted almonds, roughly chopped**
- **2 cups sugar**
- **4 teaspoons pectin**

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: 5 (8-ounce) canning jars with lids and screw bands; a boiling-water canner or an 8- to 10-quart deep pot; tongs; ladle; an instant-read thermometer

Wash jars, lids and screw bands in hot, soapy water, then rinse well. Dry screw bands. Put jars on a rack in canner or deep pot and add enough water to cover by 2 inches. Put tongs and ladle into pot, making sure lower 5 inches of tools are submerged in the water. Bring to a boil and boil for 10 minutes (see note). Remove from heat, leaving jars in water. In a small saucepan, heat lids in water to cover by 2 inches until thermometer registers 180° (do not let boil). Remove from heat, leaving lids in water. Keep the jars and lids submerged in hot water, covered, until ready to use.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Fill a large bowl ⅓ full with ice and cold water. Blanch apricots 30 seconds, then, using a slotted spoon, transfer to prepared ice bath. Drain apricots, then peel, halve, pit and cut into ½-inch pieces.

In a large saucepan, mix together apricots, almonds, sugar and pectin; bring to a boil and cook, stirring frequently, until apricots are cooked through and falling apart, about 10 minutes.

Drain jars upside down on a clean kitchen towel 1 minute, then invert. Ladle marmalade into jars, leaving ½ inch of space at top. Wipe off rims of filled jars with a clean damp kitchen towel, then top with lids and screw on "finger tight" (just screwed on with your fingertips, not cranked tight with your palm). Put sealed