THE LAST TOUCH

Hello, Puddin' Sidle up to luscious vanilla or almond-spiked Mexican chocolate. Whatever you're craving, these four homemade puddings have got you covered.

BRANDIED FIG VANILLA PUDDING

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 2 HR

- ⅓ cup sugar
- 2½ Tbsp cornstarch
- 2 cups whole milk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter, cut into bits
- 1½ tsp pure vanilla extract
- ⅓ cup fig or other preserves
- 1 Tbsp brandy, or to taste
- ½ tsp fresh lemon juice

▸Whisk together sugar, cornstarch, and ⅛ tsp salt in a heavy medium saucepan, then whisk in milk and cream. Bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking frequently, then boil, whisking, 1 minute. Remove from heat and whisk in butter and vanilla.

▸Divide among 4 (6- to 8-oz) glasses and chill, uncovered, until cold, at least 1½ hours.

▸Stir together preserves, brandy, and lemon juice, then spoon on top of puddings.

COOKS' NOTE: **For a Web-exclusive recipe using leftover fig preserves, go to gourmet.com/go/morerecipes.**

TAPIOCA PEARL PUDDING WITH LYCHEES AND MANGO

SERVES 6 TO 8

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 1¾ HR

- 6 cups water
- 1 cup small (⅛-inch) pearl tapioca (not quick-cooking)
- 1 (20-oz) can lychees in syrup
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 2 (3-inch) strips lime zest
- 1 (2-inch) piece peeled ginger, thinly sliced
- 1 large ripe mango, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 tsp fresh lime juice

▸Bring water to a boil in a heavy medium saucepan, then stir in tapioca. Simmer, stirring often, 10 minutes. Cover and remove from heat. Let stand until most of pearls are translucent, 25 to 30 minutes.

▸Drain syrup from lychees into a small saucepan and add sugar, zest, ginger, and ¼ tsp salt. Simmer, stirring occasionally, 10 minutes, then remove from heat and let stand 5 minutes.

▸Coarsely chop lychees and put in a bowl with mango. Drain tapioca in a colander and rinse under cold water until cool, then add to fruit. Strain syrup though a fine-mesh sieve into fruit. Stir in lime juice and let stand 1 hour for flavors to blend.

SPANISH RICE PUDDING

SERVES 6

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 2½ HR

- 1 cup water
- ½ cup long-grain white rice
- 4 cups whole milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 3 (4-inch) strips lemon zest
- 1 (3- to 4-inch) cinnamon stick
- ½ tsp pure vanilla extract

GARNISH: ground cinnamon

▸Bring water to a boil with ¼ tsp salt in a large heavy saucepan. Stir in rice and return to a boil. Cook, covered, over low heat until water is absorbed, about 18 minutes. ▸Stir in milk, sugar, zest, and cinnamon stick and simmer, uncovered, stirring often, until thickened and rice is tender, 40 minutes to 1 hour. Stir in vanilla. Cool to lukewarm in a large shallow bowl, surface covered with a piece of buttered wax paper.

MEXICAN CHOCOLATE PUDDING

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 2 HR

- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2½ Tbsp cornstarch
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 2 cups plain unsweetened almond milk (see Shopping List, page 106)
- 1½ Tbsp unsalted butter, cut into bits
- ½ tsp pure vanilla extract

ACCOMPANIMENTS: lightly sweetened whipped cream; toasted slivered almonds

▸Whisk together brown sugar, cocoa, cornstarch, cinnamon, and ⅛ tsp salt in a heavy medium saucepan, then whisk in almond milk. Bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking often, then boil, whisking, 1 minute. Remove from heat and whisk in butter and vanilla. Chill in a bowl, surface covered with a piece of buttered wax paper, until cold, at least 1½ hours.

COOKS' NOTE: **For a Web-exclusive recipe using leftover plain almond milk, go to gourmet.com/go/morerecipes.**