

## CARAMEL RICE FLAN

Time: 3 hours, plus overnight chilling

Butter or cooking spray for the soufflé dish  
 $\frac{2}{3}$  cup Arborio rice  
 $4\frac{3}{4}$  cups milk  
2 3-inch cinnamon sticks  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons ground cardamom  
Grated zest of 1 lemon  
2 teaspoons cardamom pods, cracked with the side of a knife  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup heavy cream  
3 eggs  
2 egg yolks  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt  
 $1\frac{1}{3}$  cups sugar.

1. Heat the oven to 300 degrees. Lightly butter, or use cooking spray, on a  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -quart soufflé dish (preferably nonstick). In a medium saucepan, bring 2 cups water to a boil. Stir in rice and cook for 15 minutes. Drain, then add rice to a medium saucepan with 4 cups of the milk, the cinnamon sticks and the ground cardamom. Bring to a boil, lower the heat, and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, or until the rice is very tender. Drain away any milk that has not been absorbed, then put rice into a medium bowl and stir in the lemon zest.

2. To make the custard, in a medium saucepan, over medium-low heat, combine the remaining  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup milk, the cardamom pods and the cream. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl whisk together the eggs, yolks, salt and  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of the sugar. When the milk mixture comes to a simmer, slowly ladle it into the egg mixture, whisking constantly. Pour the mixture through a strainer

back into the pan (discarding cardamom), then stir in the rice.

3. To make the caramel, in a heavy small saucepan stir together the remaining cup of sugar and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water and bring to a boil. Cook over high heat for 5 to 8 minutes, swirling the pan occasionally, until the mixture turns a honey-amber shade. Immediately pour into the soufflé dish, swirling to make sure the caramel coats about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the height of the dish.

4. Without waiting for the caramel to harden, immediately pour the rice mixture into the caramel-coated soufflé dish. Fill a large roasting pan halfway with very hot tap water, and place the soufflé dish in the roasting pan. Cover roasting pan tightly with foil and punch several holes in the foil in the corners of the roasting pan. Place the pan in the center of the oven and bake for about 2 hours (start checking after 1 hour and 45 minutes) or until the custard is set around the edges but the center still jiggles slightly. Remove dish from the water bath, cool on a rack, then refrigerate until set and cold, at least 6 hours or preferably overnight.

5. To serve, place the soufflé dish in a large bowl filled with enough boiling water to come halfway up the side of the soufflé dish. Let stand for 20 minutes, dry the bottom of the soufflé dish, then run a knife around the edge of the custard and turn it out onto a platter. (It will stick and not look picture perfect.) Serve with a spoon.

**Yield:** 8 to 10 servings.



ANDREW SCRIVANI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**BONDED** Caramel rice flan is made with short grain rice, which has more starch and helps the eggs bind the custard.

ONE of the things I missed most after moving out of my parents' house was their prodigious and quirky cookbook collection. Whenever I'd visit, I'd page through the volumes, copying out recipes, then subway it home to cook them in my tiny apartment.

One of my favorite recipes was called Catalan rice flan.

It was unusual in that it wasn't like the soft and spoonable flans I'd met before. This one baked into a solid yet still creamv cake that I sliced and served in

wobbling wedges topped with its own ambrosial caramel sauce. I made it repeatedly for several months, then dropped it to conquer some other culinary frontier — poundcake, I think.

But a recent rice pudding yen made me think about that flan as a more elegant alternative.

The problem was that I no longer had the scribbled recipe, nor could I recall the name of the book from which I'd lifted it.

Meaning I'd pretty much have to

start from scratch, beginning with the rice itself.

I knew that, in Catalonia, many of the rice dishes are made with short grain rice. This suited me fine. The pillowy texture of the short grains reminds me of tapioca, with a grainier bite. Short grain rice is also starchier than long grain, which helps the eggs bind the custard. Combining whole eggs and yolks would make the flan rich and light.

I remembered that the original recipe used lemon zest, and to that I added car-

damom, both the ground seeds, for their intensity, and the pods, which add a delicate citrus perfume that's absent from the powder.

Finally, I made sure to get the caramel nice and dark, the depth of milk chocolate but with a reddish cast. When I first made the flan, in my 20s, I was so scared of burning the sugar that I undercooked it, until I realized how much better, nuttier and less sweet dark caramel tastes.

I'd like to write that I whipped up a

flan according to plan and that it led to a taste memory explosion of silky smooth custard studded with rice, scented with lemon and spice and glistening with amber syrup.

In fact, I had to make it nine times before I was happy, leaving a trail of crunchy rice, curdled custard and bitter-tasting batches in my path.

Once I had it, I wrote down the recipe and put it in a safe place. I'd finally learned my lesson — nine attempts and 20 years later.