

Delight in blood orange creme brulee

It's citrus season, and there's no better way to embrace it than with blood oranges. Despite their graphic name, blood oranges are sweet, delectable and unique. They are smaller than standard oranges, with mottled orange and rose-hued rinds. When peeled, their interior reveals segments streaked in brilliant crimson, ruby and port wine colors — hence their name.

Blood oranges are packed with vitamins C and A and contain a compound called anthocyanin, which is a powerful antioxidant that makes their flesh their signature color. (It's the same compound that turns blueberries and blackberries blue and purple, and cranberries and cabbage red.) The flavor of the orange is seductively murky, wine-y, and understatedly sweet, with less brightness and acidity than navel oranges.

The unique flavor of blood orange lends well to desserts, syrups, cocktails and sauces. In this recipe, it provides a wonderful contrast to the creamy sweetness of creme brulee. A layer of blood orange curd, punctuated with a pop of sea salt, provides the base to the custard as well as a fresh — and colorful — surprise when dipped into with a spoon. A Cointreau-blood orange supreme finishes the custard as an optional garnish. (Supreme is a French method to segment citrus fruit by neatly removing the pith and membranes.)

Yes, the holiday season is behind us, but that should not deter us from making an impressive dessert. This recipe takes some time to prepare, but each component can be made in advance of serving. Consider it a fun weekend project. The results will brighten any winter doldrums and provide a perfect excuse to invite a few friends over for a cozy and convivial gathering.

Blood Orange Creme Brulee

Active Time: 45 minutes
Total Time: 1 hour and 20 minutes, plus cooling time
Yield: Makes 6 servings
Blood Orange Curd Ingredients:
 4 large egg yolks
 2/3 cup sugar
 1/2 cup strained fresh blood orange juice
 1/4 cup unsalted butter, softened
 1/8 teaspoon sea salt
Custard Ingredients:
 6 large egg yolks
 2/3 cup granulated sugar
 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
 2 cups heavy cream
Topping Ingredients:
 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
 3 tablespoons light brown sugar
 Pinch of sea salt
Steps:
To make the curd:
 Place the yolks, sugar and juice in the pot of a double boiler placed over simmering water. Whisk to blend and continue to stir with a



LYNDA BALSLEV/TASTEFOOD

Blood orange creme brulee features a seasonal citrus favorite.

wooden spoon until the mixture thickens and coats the back of the spoon, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove from the heat and whisk in the butter and salt until melted.

Pour the curd into a glass container. Line the top of the curd with plastic wrap to prevent a skin from forming and cool to room temperature. The curd will continue to thicken as it cools. (The curd can be prepared up to 3 days before using.)

To make the custard:
 Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Arrange six (6-ounce) ramekins in a baking dish. Spoon a layer of chilled curd into the ramekins, about 1/4 inch deep.
 Whisk the egg yolks, sugar, and vanilla until light and fluffy.

Heat the cream in a large saucepan over medium heat until it just begins to boil. Remove from the heat and add the cream to the egg mixture in a steady stream, whisking gently to blend. Pour the custard back into the saucepan and cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the custard thickens slightly and coats the back of the spoon, about 5 minutes.

Ladle the custard into the ramekins. Pour boiling water into the baking dish halfway up the ramekins to make a water bath (bain marie).

Transfer the baking dish to the oven and bake until the custards are just set but still a bit jiggly, 35 to 40 minutes. (If the tops begin to brown before set, loosely cover the baking dish with parchment paper or aluminum foil.)

Transfer the baking dish to a wire rack and cool the custards in the water for 15 minutes. Remove the ramekins from the pan and cool

completely on the rack. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 6 hours or overnight.

Before serving, mix the granulated sugar, brown sugar and salt together in a small bowl. Sprinkle each ramekin evenly with the sugar to cover. Light a blowtorch and hold the flame 2 to 3 inches above the custard, slowly moving it back and forth until the sugar melts and turns deep golden brown. (Alternatively, place the ramekins on a baking sheet and broil under an oven broiler until the tops are deep golden brown, carefully watching to prevent burning.) Let stand for about 5 minutes to allow the top to harden. Serve with the blood orange supreme.

To make the blood orange supreme:
 2 blood oranges, segmented
 2 teaspoons Cointreau or orange-flavored liqueur
 1 teaspoon sugar

Using a chef's knife or paring knife, cut the top and base from each orange. Stand the orange on the cutting board and cut away the skin and pith, making sure that all the white pith is removed. Using a paring knife, cut along the membranes to lift out and release the orange segments. Place the segments in a bowl. Sprinkle the Cointreau and sugar over and stir to combine. Let stand for at least 30 minutes or refrigerate overnight. Use segments to garnish creme brulee dishes.

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Artificial light interrupts your circadian cycle

Q We live in Northern California, and every time we have high winds, the electric company shuts off power because of the fire danger. We use candles and lanterns to light the house, and my husband thinks that he sleeps better on those nights. Do you think there's a connection?

A We humans, like most creatures on this planet, are keyed to the daily cycle of light and dark. It's reflected not only in our habits and behaviors, but research shows that it plays out at the cellular — and even the molecular — level, as well. Known as the circadian cycle, and often referred to as the body clock, it guides metabolic and biological processes throughout our bodies. A number of these, including the regulation of body temperature, hormone secretion and alertness, play key roles in preparing the body to switch from wakefulness to sleep.

Studies have shown that exposure to even small amounts of artificial light can delay the body's important sleep prep. It means that with the very first campfire humans lit to push back the night, they disrupted the sensitive mechanisms of the circadian cycle. As firelight gave way to candlelight, then to gas light and now to electric light, that disturbance grew progressively more pronounced. That's because, as we now know, spending time in bright light slows production of melatonin, which is the hormone whose nighttime spike helps make us sleepy. The advent of blue light in all of the screens we use has also been shown to wreak havoc on sleep quantity and sleep quality.

In a small study conducted by researchers at the University of Colorado at Boulder, eight participants camped in a wilderness area so remote, it was free of any artificial light. The campers left all portable light sources behind and lived solely by natural daylight. Lab tests showed that after only a week, their daily melatonin rhythms, as well as their individu-

ASK THE DOCTORS



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al sleep schedules, were syncing to the daily ebb and flow of light. The takeaway was that, due to reduced exposure to sunlight in our largely indoor lives, and the near-constant presence of electric lights, human

circadian physiology has been altered.

Interestingly, another study found a wide range in tolerance to artificial light. For some participants, the dim glow of just a few candles caused the same drop and delay in melatonin production that others in the study experienced only in the presence of sustained bright light. All of which adds up to the fact that yes, it's entirely possible your husband's sleep improves when his days and evenings are free from screens and electric lights. This is important because insufficient sleep and low-quality sleep are linked to a number of serious health conditions. These include high blood pressure, depression, obesity and coronary heart disease. The sleep deficit in the United States is so severe, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has flagged it as a public health problem.

You don't need to go cold turkey on electrical light. But the research is clear: Spending more time in daylight and dimming the lights — after dark can add up to better sleep.

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Non-dairy treats leave lactose behind with alternative ingredients

Take care of your health and help stop the spread of COVID-19 to save lives. Please verify information before you share any misinformation about diet and dietary supplement cures for COVID. There are none. Yet, it is important to eat healthy and be physically active to support a healthy immune system.



KATHY KOLASA

creams are made with soy, almond or coconut milk which do not contain lactose, making it safe for people with lactose intolerance to consume.

From my experiences, coconut milk-based ice

cream has the natural sweetness that you expect from coconuts and a good texture. Almond milk-based ice cream has a very mild flavor which allows for any added flavors to come through. The downside to almond products is the texture can sometimes be grainy and weird. I'm not a fan of soy milk that many people use to transition from regular milk to a non-dairy milk because it leaves me with an unpleasant taste in my mouth, so I haven't tried soy based frozen desserts.

I mentioned I have lactose intolerance. My body is unable to properly absorb lactose — a natural sugar found in dairy products like milk, cheese and ice cream. About 70 percent of adults have too little lactase to break down lactose for better absorption. I chose to follow a plant-based diet about four years ago to better manage my weight and found that



BEN & JERRY'S

Most plant-based ice creams are made with soy, almond or coconut milk which do not contain lactose. Ben & Jerry's is one brand that offers many non-dairy flavors.

the upset stomach I got eating cheese or milk disappeared. Switching to almond milk as my main choice of milks has helped and I can consume with less severe side effects.

There is a surprisingly good selection of almond milk-based frozen desserts in our area. Ben & Jerry's has the best selection of flavors, having re-created most of

their usual flavors to offer something different than the basic chocolate or vanilla from other brands. So Delicious and Haagen-Dazs focus more on frozen bars. Breyers offers almond milk based frozen desserts in quarts if you want to buy enough for the whole family.

I looked at the Nutrition Facts labels to see what differences

in the calories, fat, sugar and protein were. I was surprised. There are fewer calories (but not a lot fewer) in a serving of plant-based ice cream than any of the milk based — depending on the amount of fat and sugar. For example, comparing Breyer's non-dairy and regular cookies and cream flavor, non-dairy has 170 calories with 7 grams of fat and 18 grams of sugar per serving with regular ice cream having 190 calories with 6 grams of fat and 21 grams of sugar. This is the same if you were to look at a Ben & Jerry's product.

I'd suggest if you were trying to save calories by going plant based, look for products with less sugar or think about eating an alternative frozen dessert like frozen fruit bars. There are many different brands, and they are usually low in calories and sugar in flavors like strawberry, oranges and cherry.

The frozen fruit bars made by Outshine have 60 calories, no fat and lower sugar content than ice cream.

The next time you reach for a dairy or non-dairy frozen dessert, think about what place it has in your total diet and pick one that meets your health and weight goals. Be mindful of the portion size you actually eat.