

CHOCOLATE ALMOND CARAMEL TARTLETS



This classic Parisian dessert is both showy and delicious. The addition of ground almonds gives the buttery crust richness and a wonderfully crumbly texture. It is blissfully delicious and makes an elegant base for the chocolate custard. The caramel topping adds a layer of decadence that might seem a step too far, but because the brandied chocolate pudding is bittersweet, it brings the tart's three elements into balance. Topped with lightly sweetened whipped cream and cocoa powder, this stunner will bring you back to that lovely patisserie by the Seine.

- Leslie Mackie

INGREDIENTS:

Makes eight 3-inch tartlets

SWEET ALMOND DOUGH

1/2 cup whole almonds
1 1/2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
1/3 cup granulated sugar
8 Tbsp unsalted butter (1 stick)
1/2 tsp pure vanilla extract
1/2 tsp almond extract

CHOCOLATE CUSTARD AND CARAMEL TOPPING

2 cups heavy cream, divided
3/4 cup bittersweet chocolate chips
5 egg yolks
1 cup + 3 Tbsp sugar, divided
1 Tbsp brandy
1/2 cup water

OPTIONAL GARNISH

Reserved chopped almonds
Cocoa powder
Whipped cream

DIRECTIONS:

SWEET ALMOND DOUGH

Preheat oven to 350°F and line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.

Place almonds on the prepared baking sheet and roast for 15 to 18 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes. Finely chop in a food processor and set aside.

In a medium bowl, add 1/3 cup of the chopped almonds, flour and sugar. Mix thoroughly. Reserve any remaining chopped almonds for garnishing.

In a small saucepan, melt the butter. Turn off heat and cool for 5 minutes, then add vanilla and almond extracts.

Make a well in the center of the flour bowl. Begin adding the melted butter and mix with a spoon until thoroughly combined. Measure 3 Tbsp of the almond dough and press into a 3-inch tartlet shell so that the base and sides are an even thickness. Repeat for each tartlet. Chill for 30 minutes in the refrigerator.

Line each chilled tartlet shell with parchment and fill with pie weights (beans or rice also work). Bake for 30 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove parchment and pie weights. Let cool.

CHOCOLATE CUSTARD AND CARAMEL TOPPING

To make the chocolate custard, scald 1 1/2 cups heavy cream in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the bittersweet chocolate chips to a blender or food processor. Pour the hot cream over the chips and blend until melted.

Combine the egg yolks, 3 Tbsp sugar and brandy in a small bowl. Add to the chocolate mixture in the blender and mix for 3 to 4 minutes.

Fill the baked shells with chocolate mixture nearly to the top, stopping a scant 1/8 inch from the rim of the baked shells—the extra crust will act as a border for the caramel sauce topping.

To make the caramel sauce, add the water and the remaining 1 cup of sugar to a medium saucepan. Over medium heat, dissolve the sugar and cook until the mixture turns golden brown. Run a wet pastry brush around the edges of the pan to prevent any sugar crystals from forming. When medium brown, turn off the heat and slowly add the remaining 1/2 cup of cream to the mixture. Be careful—this will create lots of steam. Whisk vigorously to combine. Transfer to another bowl. Let the caramel cool for 15 minutes.

Ladle caramel over each tartlet so that they are evenly covered. Garnish with the remaining chopped almonds. Chill the tartlets until cool.

Lightly sweetened whipped cream makes a delicious topping and a sprinkle of cocoa powder makes a handsome garnish.