

BUONA DOMENICA

Panna Cotta di Zucca

Pumpkin Panna Cotta

Roasted and puréed pumpkin or, more accurately, winter squash, gives classic panna cotta a soft golden hue and a delicate earthy sweetness. A few spoonfuls of mascarpone makes it extra creamy so that it lies somewhere between a true, wobbly panna cotta and a rich custard. Don't skip the step of passing the squash purée through a fine-mesh sieve to remove any stringy fibers; it makes a difference.

My favorite squashes for this dessert are those sweet, dense-fleshed ones with pulp that turns smooth and velvety when puréed: Buttercup, Kabocha, and Red Kuri. Butternut, of course, makes a good substitute, as does Black Futsu, a small, squat squash with a bumpy rind and a sweet flavor that leans towards chestnut.

You can chill the panna cotta in a mold or a bowl (I use a 1 1/2 qt soufflé dish), and then unmold it onto a serving plate, or you can simply spoon it out into dessert bowls. Or, chill it in individual servings (goblets make an impression!). The amaretti garnish is optional. I was reluctant to try it, as I thought the sharp almond flavor might drown out the much gentler notes of the pumpkin. But the two complement one another. You might be tempted, when you see the almost negligible amount of spice called for, to add several pinches more. Resist—we are not aiming for the aggressive Starbucks-y pumpkin spice aroma that has permeated every corner of autumn.

Makes 8 servings

INGREDIENTS

1 medium winter squash, 1 1/2 to 2 pounds (680 g to 910 g)

3 cups (720 ml) heavy cream

2/3 cup (130 g) sugar

1/2 vanilla bean

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

A small grating of nutmeg, or a pinch of ground nutmeg

1 (1/4-ounce /7-g) envelope unflavored powdered gelatin

4 ounces (115 g) mascarpone cheese, at room temperature

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 375° F (190° C).
2. **Roast the squash:** Use a large, sturdy chef's knife to split the squash in half from top to bottom. Scoop out and discard the seeds (or reserve them for roasting and snacking on). Place the halves, cut-side down, on a parchment- or foil-lined rimmed baking sheet. Bake for 45 to 60 minutes, until completely tender and you can easily pierce through the rind into the flesh with a skewer or fork. Remove from the oven and let cool; then scoop out the flesh and discard the rind. Measure out 1 cup (250 g) and reserve the rest of the pulp for another use—like [pumpkin-mascarpone pie](#).
3. Use a potato masher or an immersion blender to mash the cooked squash into a smooth purée. Force the purée through a fine-mesh sieve into a large mixing bowl. Cover and set aside.
4. Combine the cream and sugar in a medium, heavy-bottom saucepan. Scrape in the seeds from the vanilla bean half. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until the sugar has dissolved, and the mixture is almost at a simmer, about 7 minutes. Remove from the heat and whisk in the cinnamon and nutmeg. Cover and let steep for 20 minutes.
5. Sprinkle the gelatin into a small bowl and pour 3 tablespoons cold water over it. Stir briefly, then let it stand for 5 minutes, until thickened. Uncover the cream mixture and reheat it until you see wisps of steam rising from the saucepan. Whisk in the gelatin, stirring until it is completely dissolved. Remove from the heat and let cool for 10 minutes.
6. Fold the mascarpone into the cooled squash purée until blended thoroughly. Slowly whisk the cream and gelatin mixture into the purée. Pour the mixture through a clean fine-mesh sieve into whichever vessel or vessels you plan to use to serve the panna cotta. Cover tightly with wrap and refrigerate until completely set, at least 3 hours and up to overnight.
7. If you plan to unmold the panna cotta, dip the bottom of the mold into a pan of hot water for 10 to 15 seconds. Run a thin knife or angled metal spatula along the inside rim of the mold. Place a serving plate upside-down on top of the mold and invert. You may have to give the bottom of the mold a few knocks or jostles to get the panna cotta to dislodge, but it should obey eventually.
8. To serve, arrange some amaretti on top of the panna cotta, or break them into pieces and sprinkle on top. Or skip the amaretti entirely and serve the panna cotta on its own.

NOTE: As I mentioned in the head note, adding mascarpone to the pumpkin cream and gelatin mixture gives the dessert a texture somewhere between classic panna cotta wobble and rich custard or pastry cream. If you prefer the more classic texture, leave out the mascarpone.