

ÇİLEKLI KREM STRAWBERRY CREAM

A handful of ripe strawberries

3 egg yolks

7 tablespoons sugar

3 tablespoons flour

2 glasses (50cl) milk

Butter

This dessert recipe was given to me by my beloved aunt Habibe a long time ago, during my very first days in my own kitchen. It is the classic *crème pâtissière*, but it was an ingenious way to encourage a beginner. It is simple and unfailing. To end a meal with this silky dessert leaves everyone with a feeling of contentment.

Fragrant strawberries are best, but raspberries or ripe bananas are good alternatives. This cream is also an ideal filling for fruit tarts or piped into puff-pastry cases.

1 Rinse the strawberries and reserve a few of the best-looking ones for decoration. Hull the rest. With a paper tissue, dry the fruit without bruising it and set aside. If the strawberries are large, halve or quarter them.

2 In a deep pan whisk the egg yolks with the sugar. Add the sifted flour and mix. Pour the cold milk into the pan, whisking continuously to obtain a smooth texture.

3 Cook the mixture over a gentle heat, stirring until it begins to bubble and thicken. Simmer a little longer to allow the flour to cook completely.

4 Add the strawberries and a few knobs of butter to the hot cream, stir and leave to cool, covered, to allow the cream to absorb the intense flavour of the fruit.

5 Serve chilled in an elegant bowl, decorated with the remaining strawberries.

ÇİLEKLI KOLAY KEK SIMPLE STRAWBERRY CAKE

A handful of strawberries

1/2 packet biscuits

2 tablespoons butter (melted)

250–300g mild natural yoghurt

150g soft cream cheese

3 tablespoons sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons gelatin

1/2 glass hot water

A version of cheesecake that needs neither baking nor turning out, this cake is very easy to make, light (since the main ingredient is yoghurt), delightfully satiny and altogether irresistible.

Any plain biscuits such as petits beurrés or digestives, or even stale leftover sponge cake, will do.

1 Crumble the biscuits and mix in a bowl with the butter. Transfer the mixture to a deep pie dish. Flatten the surface with the back of a spoon. Refrigerate to harden the base.

2 Sprinkle the gelatine onto the hot water and stir to ensure that it dissolves completely.

3 Whisk the yoghurt with the cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Stir the dissolved gelatine into the yoghurt mixture, reserving about two spoonfuls.

4 Spoon the mixture into the biscuit-lined dish and put it back into the fridge or, better still, the freezer.

5 When the yoghurt mixture has set, slice the strawberries and decorate the top of the cake. Spoon the rest of the gelatine over the fruit to give it an appealing glaze. Refrigerate to set further and serve chilled.

ÇİLEK LİKÖRÜ STRAWBERRY LIQUEUR

1kg small, fragrant strawberries

35cl pure alcohol or vodka

400g sugar

50cl water

2 mastic drops (optional)

2 tablespoons sugar

Silva Özyerli, whose liqueurs are renowned, has inherited this recipe from her relations. In Diyarbakır, in southeast Turkey, where her family comes from, it was customary to offer all visitors a liqueur with a cup of Turkish coffee.

I also recall guests in İstanbul being offered chocolates with various liqueurs, home-made or shop-bought. Countless silver, crystal or fine-glass liqueur sets float around antique shops today, witness to this old urban custom. For this liqueur, Silva Hanım chooses the small, scented wild strawberries of spring. The mastic (hardened resin drops of the *Pistachia lentiscus* tree) is an optional addition. According to her, mastic deepens the aroma without dominating the taste. If you cannot find pure alcohol, then vodka is the answer.

1 Rinse and hull the strawberries and pack into a glass jar. Fill with alcohol to cover and replace the lid. Store in a cool place away from sunlight for 30 days. Shake the jar from time to time.

2 After 30 days strain the contents of the jar through a sieve lined with muslin.

3 Heat the sugar in water, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Set aside to cool, then stir in the strained strawberry juice.

4 Pound the mastic drops with two extra tablespoons of sugar and put into a clean jar. Pour the strawberry syrup over, seal and store once more in a cool, dark place. Forget about it for around 40 days while it slowly matures.

5 After 40 days the liqueur should have lost its alcoholic edge. If not, leave it for perhaps a week or two more.

6 At the end of two months the liqueur is certain to have achieved its customary velvety mellowness. Then strain it one last time, pour into bottles and keep in the fridge to be enjoyed with desserts or to accompany a cup of strong Turkish coffee.

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