

# Silky, Sumptuous Chocolate Pudding

A creamy custard that's both homey and sophisticated begins with top-notch chocolate

BY DAVID PAGE & BARBARA SHINN

Toward the end of the evening, as the noise level in our restaurant subsides, we can hear the telltale sound of our customers enjoying every last bit of the chocolate pudding we serve. It's the sound of a dessertspoon scraping anxiously against the bottom of a ceramic ramekin. When we don't hear any spoons clinking, it usually means that the pudding eater has moved on to using a finger to clean the dish of any remaining chocolate streaks.

Part of the pudding's appeal is that it's homey and straightforward, yet it's so different from what most people think of chocolate pudding. Accustomed to "fast-food" puddings that are loaded with artificial ingredients and preservatives, customers are delighted to discover our version, made rich and smooth with high-quality chocolate.

What many of our customers haven't discovered is just how easy this pudding is to make. Follow the suggestions offered here, and you'll be licking clean your own bowl of homemade pudding.

## GREAT CHOCOLATE BEGETS GREAT PUDDING

Because there are so few ingredients in the pudding—chocolate, egg yolks, cream, sugar, vanilla, and salt—each must be of the best quality. Fresh heavy cream and fresh eggs help guarantee a rich custard, but it's the chocolate that matters most, so use the best you can find.

We make our pudding with Valrhôna bittersweet chocolate. Aside from its magnificent flavor, the chocolate contains a high amount of cocoa butter, giving it a luscious, smooth texture and wonderful

melting qualities. You can find Valrhôna and other fine brands of chocolate, such as Callebaut and Lindt, in some supermarkets and at specialty food shops.

**To safely melt the chocolate, pour hot cream over it.** This off-the-stove method is safer than melting the chocolate alone; it keeps the chocolate from overheating and separating, and it eliminates the possibility of the chocolate seizing—turning into a grainy mess—which can occur if a small amount of liquid comes in contact with the melting chocolate.

When all the ingredients are combined, the mixture is strained to remove any clumps of chocolate or undissolved sugar that remain. At the restaurant, we usually strain the pudding into a large container with a pour spout to make filling the individual ramekins easier, but you can simply strain it into a bowl and use a ladle to fill your containers. You can also bake the pudding in a large custard dish, something we did once when a customer requested the pudding as a surprise birthday "cake" for his girlfriend.

## BAKE GENTLY AND CHILL THOROUGHLY

A water bath cooks the pudding evenly and keeps the eggs and cream from curdling. A baking pan that's a little deeper than your molds makes a good water bath. Put the molds in the pan and carefully pour hot water in the pan to come about halfway up the sides of the molds. Covering the pan with foil keeps the pudding from cooking too quickly and forming a skin.

The pudding then gets baked in a 300°F oven; the relatively low temperature also prevents curdling.



*Straining the pudding leaves it silky smooth. You don't want any clumps of unmelted chocolate, bits of egg, or undissolved sugar.*

Photos: Mark Thomas



Cooking time depends on the size and thickness of your molds; large molds need more time than small, and thick-walled molds take longer than thin.

**The pudding is finished sooner than you might think.** If you're using standard ramekins, your pudding should cook in about an hour. You should see a lighter colored spot about the size of a quarter on top of the custard when it's ready to come out of the oven. Because we're not sure why that's so, we also judge the pudding for doneness by carefully jiggling it. If it's no longer runny and it shakes like Jell-O, take it out of the oven. Remember that the pudding continues to cook and thicken even after it's out of the oven, so it should come out when it's slightly underdone. Cooking the pudding too long can wreck its texture.

Refrigerate the pudding until it's chilled through, a good three hours. Keep the pudding covered if you want to prevent a skin from forming on top. Serve it unadorned or with a little whipped cream on top and listen for the spoons.

## Chocolate Pudding from "Home"

At the restaurant, we make this pudding in individual ramekins. You can also use coffee cups or any other dish that can withstand temperatures of 300°F. *Yields 5½ cups; serves six to eight.*

*8 oz. bittersweet chocolate, preferably Valrhôna*  
*½ cup sugar, to be divided*  
*6 egg yolks*  
*4 cups heavy cream*  
*1 tsp. vanilla extract*  
*¼ tsp. salt*

Coarsely chop the chocolate and reserve it in a large mixing bowl. In a medium bowl, whisk ¼ cup of the sugar into the egg yolks. In a medium saucepan, mix the remaining ¼ cup sugar with the cream and the vanilla extract. Heat the cream to just below the boiling point. Add a little of the cream to the eggs and stir vigorously for smoother mixing; set aside. Pour the rest of the hot cream over the chopped chocolate. Gently stir the chocolate with a spatula until it has melted. Add the egg-cream mixture and the salt to the chocolate and stir to mix. Strain the pudding into a pitcher or a bowl.

Heat the oven to 300°F. Fill six 8-oz. ramekins or eight 6-oz. ramekins with the pudding, leaving at least ¼ inch space at the top. Put the ramekins in a baking pan not more than 1 inch deeper than your molds. Fill the pan with warm water about halfway up the sides of the molds. Cover the pan with foil and bake the pudding in the water bath until no longer runny, about 1 hour. When cooked, a lighter colored spot about the size of a quarter appears on top. Cover the pudding and refrigerate for at least 3 hours before serving.

*Rich and luscious, yet familiar and comforting. Few desserts can top the sweet simplicity of chocolate pudding.*

*David Page and Barbara Shinn own Home Restaurant in New York City. ♦*



*A water bath helps pudding cook gently and evenly. Keep the eggs and cream from curdling by baking the pudding at 300°F.*

