

Night Baking

<http://nightbaking.blogspot.com/2011/05/chocolate-rose-wedding-shower-cake-with.html>

Zoe's Vanilla Pastry Cream (from Artisan Bread in 5 Minutes a Day, p. 225)

Makes about 2 cups

2 cups whole milk
1/2 cup (3 1/2 ounces) sugar, divided
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
pinch of salt
1 teaspoon vanilla (or 1/2 vanilla bean)
3 tablespoons cornstarch
1 egg
3 egg yolks

Bring the milk, 1/4 cup of the sugar, butter, salt, and vanilla to a gentle boil in a medium saucepan. Remove from heat.

While the milk is heating, in a heatproof bowl, whisk together the remaining 1/4 cup sugar and cornstarch. Add the whole egg and the egg yolks, and whisk into a smooth paste.

In order to add the hot milk to the eggs, you need to temper them; otherwise, you get scrambled eggs. Slowly, a little at a time, pour some milk into the eggs, whisking constantly. Once the egg mixture is warm to the touch, pour it back into the milk in the pan.

Return the pan to the heat and bring it to a boil, whisking constantly, and cook it for 2-3 minutes. The pastry cream will start to thicken right away, but you need to keep cooking for the 2-3 minutes to cook out the starch. When it's finished, the pastry cream will look nice and shiny and smooth.

Immediately strain the pastry cream into a flat dish or bowl. Use a rubber spatula to press it through the fine mesh sieve. Cover with plastic wrap and press the plastic wrap down completely onto the surface - you don't want a skin to form. Place the bowl in the freezer for about 15 minutes to give it a quick cool-down, then move it to the fridge and cool completely. It can stay a few days in the fridge.

Before using, whisk it to remove any lumps. If it is very thick, you can fold in some whipped cream to lighten it. This will taste fabulous but it will make the consistency very light, so if you are using it as a cake filling, it might not be firm enough to hold the layers. Start by whipping 1/2 cup of whipping cream and add about half of it and check the consistency and taste. If you are using it to fill pastry (e.g., eclairs), this lighter consistency may be perfect.