Pastéis de Nata (Portuguese Custard Tarts)

Make-ahead · Serves a crowd · Makes about 18 mini tarts

Ken's note: TBD

Flaky spiral pastry cups filled with a thick vanilla custard that blisters dark in a very hot oven, just like the ones in Portugal. They bake in batches in a standard 12-cup muffin tin.

Ingredients

Pastry

- 3 sheets all-butter puff pastry (about 21–24 oz), thawed but cold
- Flour, for dusting

Custard

- 1½ cups whole milk
- 1½ cups heavy cream
- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ tsp fine salt
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 8 large egg yolks
- ½ tsp very finely grated lemon zest (optional)

Method

1. Heat the oven to 475°F with a rack in the upper third. Lightly flour the counter and roll one sheet of puff pastry at a time into a rectangle about ⅛ inch thick. From a short side, roll each sheet tightly into a log, like a jelly roll, and cut each log into 6 equal slices (18 spirals in all). Set each spiral cut-side up in a muffin cup and press it with your thumbs up the sides, so it lines the bottom and comes about ¾ of the way up. Chill the tin while you make the custard.
2. Whisk the sugar and flour in a medium saucepan, then slowly whisk in the milk and cream until smooth. Add the salt and lemon zest, if using. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until it thickens, just comes to a gentle simmer, and coats the back of a spoon like a loose pudding. Remove from the heat and cool 5–10 minutes, stirring now and then.
3. Whisk the egg yolks and vanilla together. Slowly whisk about ½ cup of the warm milk mixture into the yolks, then pour the yolks back into the saucepan, whisking until combined. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer into a pitcher. The custard should be pourable, about as thick as heavy cream; whisk in a splash of milk if it is too thick.
4. Fill each pastry shell almost to the top, leaving about ⅛ inch of headspace. Bake 12–16 minutes on the upper rack, until the pastry is deep golden and the custard puffs and blisters with dark spots while the center still jiggles slightly. If the tops aren't browned enough, broil 1–2 minutes, watching closely. Cool in the pan about 10 minutes, then loosen the edges with a thin knife and move to a rack. The custard finishes setting as it cools.
5. Serve warm or at room temperature. Refrigerate leftovers up to 2 days and re-crisp in a 350°F oven for 5–7 minutes.