

Almond Bread Pudding with Salted Caramel Sauce

Courtesy of Bon Appetit

Serves 10

Ingredients for Almond Butter:

- 1 cup whole blanched almonds
- 1 TBSP unsalted butter at room temperature
- ¼ tsp almond extract (optional)
- ¼ tsp Kosher salt

Ingredients for Caramel Sauce:

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/8 tsp cream of tartar
- ¼ cup (or ½ stick) unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp Kosher salt

Ingredients for Pudding and Assembly:

- 1 ¼ cups Half and Half
- 1 ¼ cups Heavy Cream
- ½ Vanilla Bean, split lengthwise
- 4 Large Egg Yolks
- 3 Large Eggs
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¼ tsp Kosher salt
- Unsalted butter for coating the pan
- One 1 LBS loaf of Brioche or Challah bread, crusts removed, cut into ¾ inch thick slices (10 to 12)
- 3 TBSP sliced almonds
- 2 TBSP Raw sugar or brown sugar
- Powdered Sugar for dusting
- Crème fraiche or Whipped Cream for topping

Special Equipment: 8-inch diameter cake pan with 2 inch high sides or equivalent and a 3 inch biscuit cutter

Prepare Almond Butter: Preheat oven to 350F. Spread almonds on a rimmed baking sheet; toast in oven tossing them halfway through, until beginning to brown, 12 to 15 minutes. Let cool.

Transfer the cooled almonds to a food processor. Add butter, almond extract, and salt and process until mixture is the texture of coarsely ground peanut butter. Set aside.

Caramel Sauce: Whisk sugar, cream of tartar, and 3 TBSP water in a medium sauce pan. Bring to a boil over medium high heat, stirring to dissolve sugar. Cook, without stirring until mixture begins to caramelize in spots. Using a heat proof spatula, stir mixture to ensure even caramelization. Cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture is the color of honey, 10 to 12 minutes. Reduce heat to medium low and continue to cook, stirring occasionally until caramel is a deep amber color, about 5 minutes longer.

Remove caramel from heat; carefully whisk in butter (mixture may bubble vigorously), then cream and salt. Let cool slightly in pan then pour into a small bowl. You can make the sauce up to 2 weeks ahead. Let cool completely, cover, and chill. Rewarm before using.

Pudding and Assembly: Combine the half-and-half and heavy cream in a medium sauce pan. Scrape in the seeds from the vanilla bean and then add the bean. Bring to a simmer over medium high heat. Then remove from heat.

Whisk egg yolks, eggs, sugar, and salt in a medium bowl to blend. Gradually whisk hot cream mixture into egg mixture. Cover custard with plastic wrap and let stand 30 minutes for flavors to combine. Strain custard into a large bowl and discard the vanilla bean.

Preheat the oven to 350F. Butter the cake pan and set aside. Using a biscuit cutter, cut out circles from each slice of bread, reserving scraps. Arrange bread scraps in pan in an even layer and press lightly to compact. Spread each bread round with almond butter. Place all but 1 bread round, almond butter side down in pan on top of the scraps, overlapping slightly to create a shingled circle. Place the last round in the center. Bread will be above the lip of the pan about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch.

Pour custard evenly over bread and sprinkle with sliced almonds and raw sugar. Place cake pan in a large roasting pan. Pour hot water into the roasting pan to come halfway up the sides of the cake pan. Cover roasting pan with foil, tenting slightly in center if needed to avoid touching the bread.

Bake pudding until top no longer jiggles but center is not quite set, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove the foil from pan and increase oven temperature to 375F. Bake pudding until custard is set in the center and the top is golden brown and crisp, about 25 minutes longer.

Remove cake pan from the roasting pan. Let cool slightly. Dust pudding with powdered sugar. Slice into wedges, place on plates and drizzle with caramel sauce and top with a dollop of crème fraiche.