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Tasty custards - a perfect twist to the cheese and cracker platter

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Roasted Shallot & Jalapeno Custards Photo Susie Iventosch

We were served these tasty garlic custards at a friend's house, and for all the world they looked like a little round of Boursin cheese to me, as they sat on the serving plate amongst the endive leaves and crackers. I was so surprised when I dug into the custard and spread it on my cracker, because it had such a beautiful soft texture. And then there was the taste! It is such a lovely subtle flavor and much lighter than cheese. What a great idea, I thought. Of course, as I do, I went home and took a stab at making them for my next dinner guests, opting to use roasted shallots and finely minced jalapeno in place of the garlic, along with a bit of grated Parmesan cheese. These are so much fun and an unusual twist on the cheese and cracker platter. You can use roasted garlic, roasted shallots or even roasted red onions for different flavor profiles in the custards. Top them with a simple vinaigrette, some diced garden-fresh tomatoes and toasted pine nuts.

Roasted Shallot & Jalapeno Custards

(Makes five 3-inch custards)

INGREDIENTS

2 shallots, peeled and cut into quarters

1 clove garlic, peeled and sliced

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 jalapeno, seeded and very finely diced

1 cup heavy cream

1 whole egg

2 egg yolks

1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon white pepper

Vinaigrette (recipe below)

Garnishes: diced garden fresh tomatoes, basil leaves, toasted pine nuts

DIRECTIONS

For Shallots:

Preheat oven to 300 F. Place shallots and garlic in a piece of foil, sprinkle with a pinch of salt and white pepper. Wrap tightly and bake for about 25-30 minutes, or until shallots and garlic are cooked through and just beginning to brown. Remove from oven and cool. When cool, process shallots and garlic until smooth.

For Custards:

Meanwhile, grease five 6-ounce ramekins (3.5 inch in diameter) with butter and then spray with PAM. Set in a 9x13 casserole dish or baking pan with at least 2-inch high sides. Either keep oven at 300 F or preheat again, if you decided to prepare the shallot/garlic mixture ahead of time

Place all ingredients, including pureed shallots and garlic, in a mixing bowl and whisk until well-blended. Pour custard into prepared ramekins in the 9x13 pan. Very carefully pour water into the pan until it reaches halfway up the sides of the ramekins, being very careful not to splash any water into the custards. With steady hands, place casserole dish in oven and bake for about 45-50 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Allow custards to sit for 10 minutes or so, before inverting them onto the serving plate. (They may need a little cajoling to get out by running a knife around the edges of the ramekin or a solid slap with your hand to the bottom of the ramekin)

Garnish custards with chopped tomatoes, pine nuts and a basil sprig. Drizzle vinaigrette over the top. Serve with sliced baguette, crackers or endive leaves.

Simple Vinaigrette

Whisk together:

1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons red or white wine vinegar

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

1/4 teaspoon thyme

1/4 teaspoon sea salt

1/4 teaspoon white pepper



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[back](#)

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