

White Chocolate Lavender Panna Cotta

Courtesy of Julia M. Usher

Yield: About five - 8 to 10 ounce cup servings

3 tablespoons cold water
2 teaspoons unflavored gelatin (less than 1 package)
2-1/2 cups heavy cream
1/2 cup whole milk
2 tablespoons plus 1/4 teaspoon dried lavender buds (Provence variety)
Zest of 1/2 orange, cut into long strips with a channel zester or paring knife
1/2 cup confectioners' sugar
1-1/4 teaspoons finely minced orange zest (less than 1 orange)
4 ounces premium white chocolate, finely chopped and melted
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Garnish (optional):

Whipped cream

Fresh lavender sprigs (at least five)

Fresh orange twists (at least five)

Clean and dry five 8- to 10-ounce wine glasses or mason jars. Set aside.

Pour the cold water into a small bowl that fits a double boiler. Sprinkle the gelatin over the water and let the mixture sit 5 to 10 minutes until the gelatin is completely hydrated. Do not stir or the gelatin will form lumps. Set the bowl of gelatin over simmering water in the double boiler and melt over low heat. Remove the pan from the heat, but leave the melted gelatin over the warm water while you complete the panna cotta.

Combine the cream, milk, dried lavender and orange zest in a stainless-steel saucepan. Place the pan over medium heat and scald the cream. Remove from the heat and let the lavender and orange zest steep in the cream about 30 minutes.

Strain the cream mixture into a bowl to remove the lavender and orange zest. While the cream is still warm, whisk in the melted gelatin, confectioners' sugar and remaining minced orange zest. Allow the mixture to cool completely at room temperature and then gently whisk in the melted white chocolate and vanilla extract. Cover the surface flush with plastic wrap to prevent a skin from forming and set the mixture in the refrigerator about 1 hour, or until it has slightly thickened. Remove the plastic and gently whisk to evenly distribute any orange zest that may have settled to the bottom.

Transfer the custard to a container with a pouring spout and divide it evenly among the reserved wine glasses or mason jars. Cover each glass tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate about 3 to 4 hours until the panna cotta has completely set. Note: Panna cotta is best eaten within a few hours of reaching this point.

Garnish each dessert with a dollop of whipped cream, a sprig of fresh lavender and/or an orange twist, as desired.