

T&Cake Recipes:

Gingerbread Brioche Brûlée



Recently I was served a dessert called gingerbread brioche brûlée. It was quite delicious, and once I'd tried it I knew I had to test my own version and share it with you. Essentially it's French toast, but after soaking the brioche in the eggy custard and frying it until set, we then glaze the pieces of toast with sugar to give them a crunchy coating. This is combined with a garnish of toffee popcorn and some fresh, clean-tasting ice-cream for maximum textural

contrast.

It's nice to get the spice rack up and running for this recipe. Dried, ground spices are essential for imparting those warm, sensual flavours to cakes, breads and custards. The custard for the brioche uses the classic French mixture of dried spices, most often used in their version of gingerbread, the pain d'épices. It's more of a tea loaf, dark and spicy, but the mixture of cinnamon, nutmeg (or mace), cloves and ginger is always present. It's a versatile mixture to have about the kitchen. I have used pain d'épices spices in savoury and sweet dishes for many years. Game dishes, like roast pigeon, or perhaps a nice rare loin of venison, go well with a light touch of warming spice stirred into a rich gamey gravy of rubbed onto the meat during cooking. A regular crème brûlée or custard tart can be given a nice wintery twist with the addition of a swirl of spice. Think of fruit, too. Baked apples, or still-warm poached pears are very happy snuggled up with cinnamon and ginger in all manner of preparations from cakes to frangipane tarts. As long as you don't go overboard, there's a lot you can do with these most comforting additions.

Go exploring, and have fun. Now, let's get these crunchy little delights made. Do be aware that this recipe requires the use of a blowtorch. You can buy catering-size torches in most supermarkets these days, but any small torch from a DIY store will be fine. Don't be scared, they are easy and safe to use. Aprons on!

Gingerbread Brioche Brûlée (serves 4)

- 1 brioche loaf
- 120g unrefined golden caster sugar
- 4 free-range eggs
- 200 ml full milk
- pinch of freshly-grated nutmeg or ground mace

- pinch of ground cinnamon
- pinch of ground cloves
- pinch of ground ginger
- butter and sunflower oil for frying
- extra unrefined golden caster sugar for glazing
- a blowtorch
- a small tub of vanilla or ginger ice-cream
- some toffee-coated popcorn

For the drizzle

- 250ml water
- 200g dark brown sugar
- 30ml whipping cream
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

Firstly, make the drizzle syrup. Heat the water and brown sugar in a saucepan; bring to the boil over high heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Reduce to a gentle rolling boil and cook for about 10 minutes until slightly thickened. Remove from the heat and whisk in the cream and cinnamon. This syrup can be refrigerated and reheated. Now for the custard mixture. Whisk together the eggs and sugar, then add the spices. When all is smooth, whisk in the milk. Gently heat a little butter and a splash of sunflower oil in a frying pan. Cut your brioche loaf into nice neat shapes about 5cm cubed. Remember to freeze the crusts and trimmings for making sweet breadcrumbs. Quickly dip the brioche into the custard, making sure it soaks up the custard on all sides without falling apart. Drain quickly and fry the cubes on all sides in the pan until golden brown all over. Drain and keep warm until all the cubes are finished. To serve, heat the blowtorch for a few seconds. Roll the brioche cubes in the sugar and apply heat from the blowtorch to melt the sugar. Be careful not to overheat the sugar lest it burn. You simply want it to melt to a clear caramel around the cubes. Don't worry if you miss a bit or it looks untidy. You'll still have plenty of crunch to go at. Serve with a few pieces of toffee popcorn, a drizzle of the cinnamon syrup and a scoop of ice cream.

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