



Creme Fraiche Panna Cotta With Lemon Verbena Ice & Macerated Strawberries

Serves 6 to 8

This recipe comes from Catherine Schimenti, pastry chef at Michael Mina in San Francisco. For an attractive presentation, she recommends angling the dessert glasses by nestling them in crumpled plastic wrap in a baking dish before pouring in the panna cotta mixture, so that it sets up slanted in the glass.

The lemon verbena ice:

1/2 cup sugar
2 ounces lemon verbena, on the stem (see Note)
Juice of a 1/4 lemon (about 2 teaspoons juice)
Pinch kosher salt

The panna cotta:

1 1/2 teaspoons powdered gelatin
1 1/4 cups heavy cream
1/2 cup + 2 tablespoons sugar
1 vanilla bean, split and scraped
2 cups creme fraiche (can substitute fromage blanc or plain yogurt)

The macerated strawberries:

1 pint strawberries
1 tablespoon sugar
Pinch kosher salt

For the lemon verbena ice:

Place a large shallow bowl or an 8-inch square pan in the freezer.

In a saucepan over medium-high heat, bring 2 1/2 cups water and the sugar to a boil. Pick lemon verbena leaves off the stem and tear in half, then place into the hot liquid. Lower heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat, and let the syrup sit for at least 30 minutes to infuse the flavors.

Strain the herbs out of the syrup, and stir in the lemon juice and salt.

Pour the syrup into the pre-frozen bowl or pan in the freezer. The liquid should be about 1/2-inch thick. Allow to freeze fully, at least 2 hours.

When ready to serve, chop into small cubes or scrape with a fork as you would granita.

For the panna cotta:

Cover the gelatin with 2 tablespoons cold water to bloom; set aside.

In a saucepan over low heat, slowly warm the cream, sugar and vanilla pulp until the sugar has melted and the cream is scalded. Remove from the heat, add the gelatin mixture and let stand until the gelatin dissolves.

In a medium-sized bowl, whisk the creme fraiche until smooth. Pour the warm cream mixture over the creme fraiche and stir with a rubber spatula until combined.

Strain the mixture into a large pitcher, then portion into 6 stemless wineglasses or the dessert glasses of your choice. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

For the macerated strawberries: About 30 minutes before you're ready to serve

the dessert, clean and dry the strawberries, then hull and cut into quarters (if strawberries are very large, cut into smaller cubes). Sprinkle the sugar and salt over the berries and toss to coat. Allow to sit for 15 minutes.

To assemble: Spoon some macerated strawberries and collected juices on one side of the panna cotta. Spoon some lemon verbena ice on the other side. Serve immediately.

Note: If you can't find lemon verbena, use about 1 ounce of lemon verbena tea.

Per serving: 293 calories, 4 g protein, 36 g carbohydrate, 16 g fat (10 g saturated), 59 mg cholesterol, 44 mg sodium, 1 g fiber.

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