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Flan- Deliciously Simple

Jun
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8:02am

[By
Laura
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Flan,



otherwise known as Crème Caramel or Caramel Custard, is a rich and silky smooth dessert. It is commonly associated with Spain and Mexico; and although it is currently a staple of Latin American cuisine, flan saw its beginnings in Rome during medieval times when people began domesticating chickens. The Romans attributed good nutritional value to eggs, and therefore, flan was considered to be a “health food”. In the past, flan could be prepared as savory or sweet. In modern times we see flan being more of a dessert than a main course.



It wasn't until the Spanish invasion that flan made its way into the Americas, and since then has become a popular dessert from the northernmost point of Mexico to the southernmost region of South America, the Patagonia.

I've noticed that people have very strong feelings about flan. They either love it or hate it; a select few of those I've asked are indifferent to it. Unfortunately, some people have had really bad flan experiences and since then have refused another bite... even if that "other bite" might lead to redemption. If you've been a victim of bad flan, in the name of this decadent dessert, I do apologize and am somewhat hopeful that the recipe I'm providing you with makes up for all the flan infractions you might have previously experienced.

With over (drum roll, please!!!) 1,000 different flan recipes available, it is easy to see how choosing the right one can be very tricky, but there are recipes out there to suit everyone's taste.

Because there are so many options to choose from, I can safely state that not every flan is created equal even though the basic ingredients are (for the most part) the same: eggs, milk and sugar. The most common flavor is vanilla but it can also be prepared to showcase a variety of other flavors such as Kahlua, tequila-lime, lemon, chocolate, white chocolate, dulce de leche, almond, pistachio, walnuts, mamey (a very rare tropical fruit that is tender and juicy) , orange, coconut, sweet cheese, spices-- the list could go on and on.

Let's take a closer look....what is good flan? A basic, well prepared, taste-flattering caramel flan, should be soft and have a silky-smooth, rich, creamy, delicate texture. The caramel syrup on the top should be liquid and golden brown. Flan should be sweet, but not excessively so, and should under no circumstance taste like egg - at all.

You have probably noticed that you can now find flan-in-a-box instant mix (which requires no baking- imagine!) and the ready-to-eat kind that you can shop for at the fridge section of your local grocery store. I personally don't recommend them but I am aware that some people do like them and that the option is available. In my opinion, homemade flan or flan prepared in truly authentic Mexican restaurants is always the best.

The Caramel Kahlua Flan recipe I'm sharing with you is simple, economical, and best of all, exceptionally good; it has been voted as #1 by my students and is a true favorite among my family and friends. If you are interested in more complex flan recipes, I will be more than glad to guide you through the different realms of flan. Simply post your desire to do so in the "comments" section and I'll reply.

Before we begin with the actual recipe, I'd like to share two flan secrets which I consider to be the basics for preparing good flan. The first secret is to melt the

sugar that will become the flan syrup the right way. Be attentive while the sugar melts so that it doesn't burn. Burnt caramel has a very bitter taste to it and it certainly doesn't enhance the flavor of the flan, in fact it may just ruin it altogether. The second secret is the amount of time for which the flan is baked. If you leave it in the oven less time than required, you'll find your dessert to be a goopy disaster. On the other hand...if you leave it in too long, you will find that hard, overcooked flan is just as bad. When making this or any other flan recipe, remember these simple secrets for flan success.

The question then becomes how do you know when it is done? Simple: after the suggested time I give below, pull the flan out without removing it from the water bath. Give the pan a gentle shake (don't splash your flan with water!), and see if the flan jiggles, but still looks sort of "set" (because it does need to jiggle). Insert a toothpick or sharp knife towards the middle of the flan. If it comes out clean, the flan is done. If it does not, place it back in oven, checking it regularly. Once it is done baking, remove it from water bath and cool. It will continue to firm up as it cools. Individual ramekins might take less time to cook so check half way through the baking process.

When you check your flan, if it still hasn't set but is developing a golden brown film on the top, don't be concerned. Focus on getting the flan to set and then, after the flan cools, gently peel of the golden brown film before serving because it is not very appealing, it comes off very easily.

I hope you have a great time preparing and eating this fabulous dessert...enjoy!

Caramel-Kahlua Flan

makes 6 individual flans or a 9" loaf pan

Unlike more delicate flans, the ones that are made with condensed milk and/or cream cheese result in a richer texture.

14oz condensed milk · 12oz evaporated milk · 1 cup sugar · 4oz Kahlua or any other coffee liqueur · 6 eggs



Preheat oven to 350° F.

Melt the sugar completely over medium heat being careful not to burn it. Once it melts and becomes a light brown caramel syrup, pour into the ramekins or loaf pan. Tilt the ramekins or pan, gently swirling the caramel around the bottom of the dish, distributing the syrup evenly on the bottom. Set aside.

In a blender, or with a hand held mixer, combine the condensed milk, evaporated milk and eggs. Once the mix is perfectly smooth and all ingredients have been incorporated very well, pour the flan mixture into the individual ramekins or loaf pan. Prepare a water bath by filling a large, deep baking pan with enough water to come halfway up the sides of the ramekins or pan. Place the flan, in its dish into the water bath. Slide the flan in its water bath into the oven, preferably on bottom shelf, and bake until it is set in the center, 35 to 40 minutes. Please note that baking times will vary depending on the oven, altitude, or the size of pan(s) used. Remove flan from the water bath and let cool.

Once cool, gently run a knife around edges to separate flan from pan or ramekins. Invert each ramekin onto an individual dish. If you made the flan in the larger loaf pan, invert it over a deep serving dish to avoid an overflow of caramel.

Chef's tip: For a dramatic presentation, decorate flan & platter with seasonal berries or edible flowers.

*Please note that you can substitute the caramel with chocolate syrup, honey, corn syrup or dulce de leche for different effects and flavors.

Lead photo by Christa Glennie Seychew, inset by Laura Anhalt

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tip - place a dish towel on the botom of the water bath, before placing loaf pan or remekins into the bath; this'll reduce the likelihood of hot water splashing into the flan duing baking

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Droooool! Thank you for sharing this recipe! I know creme brulees are similar except with torch burnt tops.

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