

Very berry summer pudding with vanilla custard

Some [cancer researchers](#) recommend that we eat berries daily; this delicious dessert – inspired by the Danish summer dessert, rødgrød med fløde (literally: “red grits with cream”) – will help you achieve this goal (smoothies are another great way of getting there). Several berries – notably black and red raspberries, blackberries, strawberries and elderberries – contain an array of healthy compounds that have been found in laboratory studies to have [anti-cancer effects](#). They are also thought to [support cardiovascular and metabolic health](#) by helping lower LDL cholesterol, blood pressure, weight, glucose levels and inflammation markers. While it’s usually best to eat fruits and vegetables during their local growing season, I’m happy to make an exception here: the berry season being woefully short and fresh berries expensive (and prone to going moldy in the fridge...), it’s fine to make this with frozen berries and enjoy it all year round. Serves 6.

1.1lb/500g mixed berries (raspberries, strawberries, red- and black currants, blackberries, cranberries, gooseberries etc.) and pitted cherries – fresh or frozen
1 cup unsweetened tart cherry juice
3 tbsp corn starch
3 tbsp chia seeds
2-inch strip untreated (organic) lemon peel
1 cinnamon stick
3 tbsp maple syrup (more or less, to taste)

1 tsp natural vanilla extract
finely chopped mint leaves for garnish

Vanilla custard

1 heaped tbsp corn starch
1 tbsp fine sugar
4 egg yolks
2 cups whole milk (any plant or animal milk works here)
1 tbsp vanilla extract

Pour cherry juice into a medium-sized pot, add lemon peel, cinnamon stick, tapioca or corn starch (whichever using) and mix with a balloon whisk. Over medium heat, bring the mixture to a gentle boil, whisking continuously until it thickens (about 5 minutes). Remove from heat and discard lemon peel.

Add maple syrup, berries and vanilla extract and stir gently into the hot sauce until the berries are evenly coated with the sauce.

Spoon into a glass serving bowl or individual glasses. Decorate with mint leaves and serve at room temperature or chilled. Tastes extra-delicious when topped with homemade egg custard (directions below), a blob of Greek yogurt or sour cream, a drizzle of heavy cream (the Danish way) or a small scoop of top-quality vanilla ice-cream.

Egg custard: Fill a large bowl with cold water and add about 1 cup ice cubes. Warm milk in a small pot over medium heat. Cook, stirring frequently, until it is just about to boil, then remove from heat. While the milk is heating, mix corn starch and sugar in a heat-proof bowl and beat in the egg yolks with a wire whisk. Pour the hot milk over egg yolk mixture, whisking continuously. Return mixture to saucepan and cook over low heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, for 3-5 minutes until the custard thickens and coats the back of the spoon. Do not let custard boil as this will split the eggs. If you think it might have boiled even briefly, swiftly remove the pot from the heat and dunk it into the bowl of ice water while whisking it continuously (careful not to let any water spill into the pot!); this will halt the cooking and salvage the custard. (If you’re too late, don’t worry – it’ll taste just as good, it just won’t look quite as velvety-smooth). Serve warm or cold.