

Roasted Garlic and Thyme Custards

1 head garlic	½ pound of mushrooms
1 teaspoon olive oil	Handful of dried porcini mushrooms
1 cup milk	2 tablespoons olive oil
½ cup heavy cream	3 tablespoons butter
2 large eggs	¼ cup Madeira or dry Marsala
2 egg yolks	¼ teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
6 sprigs thyme	
½ teaspoon salt	
White pepper to taste	
Grated nutmeg to taste	
1 tablespoon softened butter	

Preheat the oven to 400°. Chop off the top ⅓ of the garlic head, drizzle with the olive oil, and wrap it tightly in foil. Roast in the oven for about 50-60 minutes until the garlic is very soft and golden. Remove from the foil, and let set until cool enough to handle. Squeeze the pulp from the garlic, and mash it as well as possible. May be done several days in advance if kept covered in the refrigerator.

Prepare the mushroom garnish first. Bring 2 cups of water to the boil, remove from the heat, and drop in the dried porcini. Let that sit for ½ hour. Remove the porcini from the liquid, saving the liquid. Squeeze the liquid out of the porcini, and dry on paper towels.

Slice the fresh mushrooms. Heat the olive oil and 2 tablespoons of butter in a skillet until very hot and the foam subsides. Add the sliced fresh mushrooms, stirring to brown on all sides. Finely chop the porcini, and add them to the fresh mushrooms for the last 2 minutes of cooking. Pour in the Madeira and ¼ cup of the porcini soaking liquid into the pan, and boil until nearly evaporated. Set aside until ready to serve.

Combine the milk, cream, mashed roasted garlic, and thyme sprigs in a heavy saucepan and heat until scalded. Remove from the heat, cover the pan, and let the mixture steep for ½ hour.

Preheat the oven to 300°, and boil a pot of water. Generously butter four ½-cup ramekins.

In a large bowl, beat the eggs and yolks with the salt, white pepper, and grated nutmeg until pale in color. Pour the milk and cream mixture through a sieve into the egg mixture, pressing down on the solids to extract as much liquid as possible.

Place the ramekins in a baking pan, and pour the custard mixture into them. Carefully pour the boiling water in the pan, deep enough that it reaches ⅔ up the side of the ramekins.

Bake for about 20-25 minutes, just until the custard is set. Remove the pan from the oven but keep the ramekins warm in the bath water.

Run a thin-bladed knife around the edge of the ramekins and unmold the ramekins on to serving plates.

Gently reheat the sautéed mushrooms, and stir in the remaining tablespoon of butter.

Spoon the mushrooms around the custard.