

Salted Butter Caramel Ice Cream

One generous quart (liter)

I know I'm sounding like a broken record, but be sure to use [good salt](#). I use [fleur de sel](#), but if you don't have it, a mild-tasting sea salt will do in a pinch, such as [Maldon](#), fine gray salt, or kosher salt. Don't use ordinary fine table salt; it's far too harsh.

Because of the caramel in this ice cream, once churned and frozen, it'll remain nice & creamy (as shown in the photo.) To make it firmer, crank up your freezer a bit or store it in a shallow pan.

For the caramel praline (mix-in)

½ cup (100 gr) sugar

¾ teaspoon sea salt, such as [fleur de sel](#)

For the ice cream custard

2 cups (500 ml) whole milk, divided

1½ cups (300 gr) sugar

4 tablespoons (60 gr) salted butter

scant ½ teaspoon sea salt

1 cups (250 ml) heavy cream

5 large egg yolks

¾ teaspoon [vanilla](#) extract

1. To make the caramel praline, spread the ½ cup (100 gr) of sugar in an even layer in a medium-sized, unlined heavy duty saucepan: I use a 6 quart/liter pan. Line a baking sheet with a silicone baking mat or brush it sparingly with unflavored oil.

2. Heat the sugar over moderate heat until the edges begin to melt. Use a heatproof utensil to gently stir the liquefied sugar from the bottom and edges towards the center, stirring, until all the sugar is dissolved. (Or most of it—there may be some lumps, which will melt later.)



Continue to cook stirring infrequently until the caramel starts smoking and begins to smell like it's just about to burn. It won't take long.

3. Without hesitation, sprinkle in the $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt without stirring (don't even pause to scratch your nose), then pour the caramel onto the prepared baking sheet and lift up the baking sheet immediately, tilting and swirling it almost vertically to encourage the caramel to form as thin a layer as possible. Set aside to harden and cool.

4. To make the ice cream, make an ice bath by filling a large bowl about a third full with ice cubes and adding a cup or so of water so they're floating. Nest a smaller metal bowl (at least 2 quarts/liters) over the ice, pour 1 cup (250 ml) of the milk into the inner bowl, and rest a mesh strainer on top of it.

5. Spread $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups (300 gr) sugar in the saucepan in an even layer. Cook over moderate heat, until caramelized, using the same method described in Step #2.

6. Once caramelized, remove from heat and stir in the butter and salt, until butter is melted, then gradually whisk in the cream, stirring as you go.



The caramel may harden and seize, but return it to the heat and continue to stir over low heat until any hard caramel is melted. Stir in 1 cup (250 ml) of the milk.

7. Whisk the yolks in a small bowl and gradually pour some of the warm caramel mixture over the yolks, stirring constantly. Scrape the warmed yolks back into the saucepan and cook the custard using a heatproof utensil, stirring constantly (scraping the bottom as you stir) until the mixture thickens. If using an instant-read thermometer, it should read 160-170 F (71-77 C).

8. Pour the custard through the strainer into the milk set over the ice bath, add the vanilla, then stir frequently until the mixture is cooled down. Refrigerate at least 8 hours or until thoroughly chilled.

9. Freeze the mixture in your ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions.

10. While the ice cream is churning, crumble the hardened caramel praline into very little bits, about the size of very large confetti (about ½-inch, or 1 cm). I use a mortar and pestle, although you can make your own kind of music using your hands or a rolling pin.

11. Once your caramel ice cream is churned, quickly stir in the crushed caramel, then chill in the freezer until firm.

Note: As the ice cream sits, the little bits of caramel may liquefy and get runny and gooey, which is what they're intended to do.

Variations: Add some strong liquid espresso (or instant espresso powder) to the custard to taste, prior to churning the ice cream to make **Coffee-Caramel Ice Cream**.

Other options might be some of the mix-ins in [The Perfect Scoop](#), like gooey Dark Chocolate Truffles, crackly chocolate *Straciatella*, or Oatmeal Praline folded in at the last minute.

This is also excellent served with warm Mocha Sauce (page 166), although it's also excellent melting over sautéed apples or alongside a wedge of apple pie or *tarte Tatin* for a caramel double-whammy.

How to Make the Perfect Caramel

85 comments - 01.29.2008



Here's my tips and step-by-step instructions for **How To Make The Perfect Caramel**.

(You may wish to also read [Ten Tips for Making Caramel](#), which preceded this post.)



This post is about the technique of caramelizing sugar. It's meant to demystify caramelizing and there's some great recipes in the previous post with tips for you to try as well as on my [Recipes](#) page.

Dry vs Wet Caramel

There's 2 different kinds of basic caramel: a **wet** caramel, where sugar is melted with water then cooked, and a **dry** caramel, where sugar is cooked by itself until it liquefies and caramelizes. Because sugar is partially water, heat liquefies it. That's why many of those low-fat desserts were full of sugar. Sugar makes things moist. Remember that next time you're thinking about reducing sugar in a recipe.

For our purposes here, I'll be talking about making a **dry** caramel, which I think is less-temperamental. The most important thing to know about making caramel is this: be sure to cook it to just the right color and flavor. Undercooked caramel just tastes sweet, and burnt caramel tastes...burned and will be unusable.

In the previous post, a few asked about using a thermometer. I once used [a professional candy thermometer](#) for a recipe I was making and the darn thing melted into an extremely unappetizing (and expensive) mess. So I think it's better just to learn to rely on your nose and your eyes. Like grilling a steak, a thermometer can be useful, but there's nothing like your senses to tell you when food is prepared to your liking.

Important!

Here's a few safety precautions you should take:

- Wear oven mitts and a long sleeve shirt. Caramel is hot and can splatter, especially when adding other ingredients to it
- Use a sturdy large pot or pan that won't overflow
- Keep a deep bowl of icy water nearby to plunge your hand in if caramelized sugar lands on it
- If you have glasses, wear them

When Is It Done?

Not having the sugar become a grainy mess is your second biggest-challenge when making caramel. The first is getting it to just the right color; no more, no less.

The color can be best described as that of an old copper penny. Perfect caramel should be cooked until it's dark, reddish-brown, and *just* past the point where it starts to smoke. Some recipes advise cooking caramel until it 'starts' to smoke—but that's too soon. The picture above, or me pouring caramel, is exactly the right color.

I take a sniff once it begins to turn amber-colored and darken; if you keep smelling it, it's fairly easy to gauge when it goes from slightly-cooked...to almost-there...to deep, rich-caramel perfection. If you screw it up, a cup of sugar is pretty cheap in case you overdo it (cheaper than that thermometer...) and after you make caramel once or twice, you should get the hang of it.



Butter or cream are often added to a 'dry' caramel to make a simple sauce

If your recipe calls for adding liquid, re-check my [previous tips](#) for advice. If your recipe calls for using the hot caramel straight, as advised by your recipe, you may want to put some icy water in a sink or a very large bowl so when the sugar reaches the right temperature, you can set the pan in the ice, which will stop the cooking quickly.

Tools

Lastly, you don't need any fancy equipment like giant copper kettles. A good saucepan or skillet will do. (I use [this pan](#) for almost everything.) Whatever pan you use, make sure it's light-colored, heavy-duty and solid. And any utensils, like [spatulas](#) you'll be using to stir should be able to withstand the heat. Most of the new silicone tools and [mats](#) are fine since they can take it up to at least 400F (200C), although you might want to check with the manufacturer if you're not absolutely certain, to avoid any meltdowns.

Making The Perfect Caramel

1. Start with an even layer of sugar in a heavy-duty pan, such as a deep skillet.

Heat the sugar over moderate heat, keeping an eye on it. The main trick at this point is that sometimes it'll start burning in a spot beneath the surface, especially if the sugar is pretty deep. But in general, it should start to liquefy at the edge first with perhaps a few blips near the middle.



2. Once the caramel starts browning at the edges, begin to drag the sugar towards towards the center to prevent any burnt spots. Once burnt, caramel can't be saved so don't let anything get to dark.

It will usually start to take on a nice, mellow brown color....



At this stage, will quickly turn darker, so pay attention!



3. If your caramel looks very lumpy and grainy, don't worry. Just lower the heat and keep stirring. Any stubborn chunks should melt. If not, they can be strained out later and should be such a small quantity that they won't likely won't affect the outcome of the recipe.

4. Help!

Ok, what happened here was it got stirred too much and the sugar lumped up before it had a chance to melt and liquefy. I know, you were trying to hurry up. But all is not lost...



Continue cooking over very low heat, stirring as little as possible.



It will come right back to being smooth. Any stubborn little bits can be strained out.

- At this point, if you're using the caramel to line a mold, like for *flan* or *crème caramel*, immediately pour the caramel into the mold or ramekins.
- For making spun sugar, you should dunk the bottom of the pan in ice water to stop the cooking so it doesn't continue to cook past the point of doneness. It'll keep cooking once you take it off the heat, unless you 'stop' it somehow, or by adding something to it.
- If you're stopping the caramel with something, such as cream or butter, add it right when the caramel reaches the desired color and depth-of-flavor.
- You can cheat and use straight caramel to top a solid custard to turn it into a *crème brûlée* by pouring a small amount over the custard, turning it to create a thin layer, and letting it cool at room temperature. Don't refrigerate them or you'll risk them becoming soggy.
- Make an easy praline by adding an equal amount of toasted nuts (equal to the sugar by weight or volume) during the last moment. Stir them in quickly with a bit of salt, then pour the mixture on a lightly-greased baking sheet. Once cool, crush and fold into ice cream, scatter over desserts, or enjoy as candy.