

# Vanilla Pastry Cream, A Perfect Pudding

Makes about 5 cups\*

\*This makes enough for 6-8 people as its own special dessert or to assemble a casual trifle or to fill a tart

We tend to take the simplest things for granted, or think of them as boring. “But what ELSE is there?” you might ask when presented with the option of eating a bowl of perfect vanilla pudding. We’re constantly looking for MORE and DIFFERENT, and might forget that milk and cream sweetened with a bit of sugar, flavored with vanilla, enriched with egg yolks, thickened with cornstarch, and set with a healthy knob of butter is as close to paradise on this wild planet as you can get. Traditionally used to fill things (tarts, éclairs, etc.), pastry cream is always billed as a means to an end, but for me, this thick, velvety vanilla custard is the end. That’s it, that’s the dessert, perfect as is.

## Ingredients

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**4 cups/945g whole milk**

**1 cup/220g sugar**

**1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise,  
or 1½ teaspoons/7g vanilla  
extract**

**8 large egg yolks**

**½ cup/65g cornstarch**

**1 teaspoon/4g kosher salt**

**4 tablespoons/2 ounces/60g  
unsalted butter**

## Instructions

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- 1 In a medium pot, combine the milk and ½ cup/110g of the sugar. If using the vanilla bean, scrape the seeds into the milk and add the pod, too (if using vanilla extract, it goes in later). Bring to a simmer over medium heat, but do not let it boil. Once simmering, remove from the heat.
- 2 Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk the remaining ½ cup/110g sugar with the egg yolks, cornstarch, vanilla extract (if using), and salt.
- 3 Slowly pour a cup of the hot milk mixture into the egg yolk mixture while whisking and whisk to blend. Do this until all the milk has been incorporated. The mixture will be loose with a starchy texture.
- 4 Return this mixture to the pot and place over medium heat. Whisk constantly, cooking until the liquid goes from thin with many small bubbles, almost like a cappuccino, to thick and gelatinous with sporadic large bubbles, bubbling from the great depths of the pot, 8–10 minutes. The mixture will have gone from soupy liquid to golden pudding faster than you think. Magic! Remove from the heat and whisk in the butter.
- 5 Transfer the pudding to a shallow baking dish or bowl and place a piece of plastic wrap or parchment paper directly on top (to prevent the “skin”). Place in the fridge and chill completely until ready to use.
- 6 When ready to serve or use, transfer the mixture to a large bowl and whisk until it goes from thick and rubbery to creamy, luscious, and smooth.

**DO AHEAD:** Vanilla pastry cream is proudly sturdy and can stay in your fridge, covered tightly, for up to 5 days.

**USE FOR:** To serve as perfect pudding, pour it into serving glasses, cups, coupes, bowls, whatever you fancy. Top with whipped cream or leave as is. After all, it is perfect. Or use it to build a casual trifle or fill a tart. Or spread onto cake, fill éclairs or cream puffs, or fold with whipped cream to make it lighter. And it’s perfectly delicious used as a layer in a tiramisu.

**ALISON ROMAN**