

Yummy baking ideas

Written by
Friday, 01 February 2013 14:34



(StatePoint) When baking for your family, there's no better way to please everyone than by highlighting every crowd's favorite flavor -- vanilla. From vanilla cupcakes to cheesecake, you can update the classics with a fresh, bold twist.

Vanilla doesn't have to be boring!

"For too long, vanilla has been misunderstood as plain, taking on only a supporting role in recipes," says Shauna Server, author of the new cookbook "Pure Vanilla: Irresistible Recipes and Essential Techniques." "With the right recipe, vanilla can really shine through."

Sever contends that the way to do this is to use whole vanilla beans and full-flavored pure vanilla extract, steering clear of the imitation variety.

For some sweet inspiration, try whipping up light and airy Vanilla Sugar Puffs using this simple recipe from Sever.

Vanilla Sugar Puffs

(Makes about 30 two-inch puffs)

For the dough:

1/2 cup whole milk

1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise

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1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 cup all-purpose flour, sifted

5 large eggs, at room temperature

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

For decorating:

1 large egg

1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Pinch salt

Swedish pearl sugar, to taste

- Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
- In a heavy-bottomed 2-quart saucepan, combine milk, 1/2 cup water, vanilla bean, butter, sugar and salt. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Carefully remove vanilla bean and scrape remaining seeds into liquid. Bring to a boil. Add flour, lower heat to medium and begin stirring vigorously with a wooden spoon until the dough starts to come away from the sides of the pan and form a loose ball. Keep stirring for about two minutes to dry the dough.
- Transfer dough to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Beat in eggs, one at a time on medium speed. Beat in vanilla extract. Drop dough by the tablespoonful onto prepared baking sheets, leaving about two inches of space between dollops.
- In a small bowl, beat together egg, vanilla extract, salt and 1 teaspoon water until well blended. Brush each puff with this egg wash and sprinkle generously with pearl sugar.
- Bake for 15 minutes, then rotate sheets from top to bottom and front to back. Continue baking until deeply golden and sound hollow when their crisp exteriors are tapped, another 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer puffs to a wire rack to cool before serving.

For additional information and recipes, visit www.QuirkBooks.com.

Whether you're baking cookies or making breakfast, you can spice up your favorite recipes with

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vanilla.