

The Venetian Room

Chef's Recipe of the Month Series

ASPARAGUS SOUP WITH PARMESAN CUSTARDS

Ingredients for custards

- 2 ½ oz Parmigiano
–*Reggiano, coarsely Grated (1 ¼ cups)*
- 1 cup Heavy cream
- ½ cup whole milk
- 1 whole large egg
- 2 large egg yolks
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- pinch of white pepper

Ingredients for soup

- 2 large leeks
(white and pale green parts only), finely chopped
- ½ cup finely chopped shallot
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 ½ # asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1 ½ -inch pieces
- 3 ½ cups vegetable stock
- ½ cups water
- ¼ cup heavy cream

Make custards:

Bring Cheese, cream, and milk just to a boil in a small heavy saucepan over moderate heat, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and steep, covered, 30 minutes.

Preheat oven to 300

Pour steeped cream through a very fine sieve into a bowl, pressing lightly on cheese solids and discarding them. Whisk together whole egg, yolks, salt and white pepper in another bowl, then add steeped cream in a stream, whisking until smooth. Divide among well-buttered ramekins. (2 oz) ramekins

Set ramekins in a baking pan and bake in water bath in the middle of oven until center of custards are completely set, about 40 minutes. Transfer ramekins to a rack and cool 5 minutes (do not cool longer, or custard will stick to ramekins.)

Make soup while cream steeps and custards bake:

Wash chopped leeks in a bowl of cold water, then lift out and drain well. Cook leek, shallots, in butter in a 4 to 6 quart heavy pot over moderately low heat, stirring, until soften, add asparagus, broth, and water salt and pepper and simmer, cover, until asparagus is just tender, 10 to 12 minutes. After 2 minutes, remove 6 asparagus tips, halve lengthwise and reserve for garnish.

Puree soup (use caution when blending hot liquids) transfer to a large bowl, then pour through a sieve into a cleaned pot. Stir in cream, taste for seasoning and heat over moderately low heat until hot.

Serve soup with custards:

Working with 1 custard at a time, run a thin knife around edge of each to loosen it, then invert a soup bowl over ramekin and invert custard into bowl. Repeat with remaining custards. Ladle soup around custards and garnish with reserved asparagus tips.

Cooks note: Soup can be made 1 day ahead. Cool, uncovered, and then chill.