

## Mixed berry tartlets with vanilla and peach cream

These gorgeous tartlets are great for entertaining and they make fabulous desserts for picnics, too, although you need to take care when packing and transporting the delicate pastry shells. Layer them in between sheets of wax paper and/or paper towels in a sturdy airtight container. If you like, lay out bowls of the vanilla and peach cream and the mixed berries next to the pastry shells and let people assemble the tarts themselves.

SERVES 6, WITH EXTRA VANILLA CREAM

1 pound, or 1 recipe, walnut pastry (see page 263 of *Cooking for Friends*)

1 pound mixed berries, such as blackberries, blueberries, wild strawberries, and raspberries (3–4 cups)

Confectioners' sugar for dusting

Vanilla and peach cream:

1 cup whole milk

1/2 vanilla bean, split lengthwise

1/4 cup granulated sugar

2-1/2 tablespoons cornstarch

3 extra-large egg yolks

1 cup heavy cream

1–2 tablespoons creme de peche, to taste

Have ready six 4-inch-diameter tartlet pans with removable bases. Roll the pastry on a lightly floured surface into a thick log. Divide the log into six equal pieces. Shape each piece into a round ball, flatten it with the palm of your hand, and roll out into a thin circle. Gently press the dough into a tartlet pan and trim off the excess pastry. Repeat with the remaining dough. Put the tart shells on a baking sheet and let rest in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes.

To make the vanilla cream, put the milk in a saucepan. Scrape the seeds from the vanilla bean and add to the milk along with the bean and 1 tablespoon of the sugar. Place the saucepan over high heat and scald the milk. Meanwhile, mix together the remaining sugar and the cornstarch in a large bowl, then beat in the egg yolks until the mixture is smooth.

When bubbles start appearing around the edge of the pan, remove from the heat and gradually trickle the hot milk into the egg mixture, stirring. When all the milk has been added, rinse out the pan. Strain the custard mixture through a fine sieve into the clean pan and return to the heat. Slowly stir over low heat for a few minutes until thickened. Pour into a large, clean bowl (for extra smoothness, strain the custard through a sieve into the bowl). Let cool, stirring occasionally to prevent a skin from forming.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line each tartlet shell with foil and fill with pie weights. Place the pans on a baking sheet and bake for 10–12 minutes. Remove the pie weights and foil and return to the oven to finish baking, about 5 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes, then unmold the pastry cases and cool on a wire rack.

Whip the cream to soft peaks. Beat the cooled vanilla custard slightly to loosen it, then fold in the cream and the creme de peche to taste. Keep refrigerated until ready to serve. Pipe or spoon the vanilla cream into each pastry shell, top with mixed fresh berries, and dust with a little confectioners' sugar.