

Chocolate and Poached Pear Pavlova

INGREDIENTS

For the meringue:

- 6 egg whites
- 300g caster sugar
- 30g cocoa powder

For the poached pears:

- 350ml red wine
- 100g caster sugar
- Cinnamon stick
- Thyme
- 4 conference pears

For the cream:

- 600ml double cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon icing sugar
- 90g dark chocolate

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 120°C/ Fan 100°C.
2. In a very clean bowl, whisk the egg whites until firm and fluffy. Using a tablespoon, slowly add spoonful's of sugar whilst continuously whisking.
3. Once all the sugar is incorporated, add the cocoa powder and continue to whisk until firm and glossy peaks form.
4. Line the base of the Le Creuset Signature Cast Iron 30cm Shallow Casserole with a circle of parchment paper and stick using a little of the meringue. Spoon the meringue into the casserole and smooth using the back of the spoon to cover the base of the casserole.
5. Place in the oven without the lid for 1 hour 45 minutes before turning off the heat and leaving to fully cool in the oven.
6. In the meantime, poach the pears. In a pan over a medium heat, add the wine, sugar, spices and thyme and gently simmer until all the sugar is dissolved - this will only take a couple of minutes.
7. Peel the pears, keeping the stalks intact. Lower carefully into the red wine syrup, ensuring the pears are totally submerged. Gently simmer over a medium heat for 25 - 30 minutes until the pears are tender - test using a small sharp knife.

8. When the meringue is fully cooled, and you are nearly ready to serve, make the cream. Simply whisk together the cream, vanilla and icing sugar to soft peaks and then spoon into the centre of the meringue.
9. Once soft, remove the pears and leave to cool. Increase the heat and allow the syrup to reduce to a thick sauce, discarding the cinnamon stick and thyme. This will take approximately 5 - 8 minutes. Slice the pears in half and then into quarters lengthways.
10. When ready to serve, place the pears on top of the cream and spoon over a little thickened red wine syrup. Finish with grated dark chocolate and serve to the table in the casserole with a jug of the remaining syrup.
11. Cook's notes
12. The ripeness of your pears will determine how fast they cook and soften in the red wine syrup. Slightly firmer pears are better as this allows them time to absorb all the delicious syrup without disintegrating.