Strawberry Vanilla Milk Puddings

4 chilled milk puddings, each with one quarter of the cooked strawberry topping | Active 24 min | Cook 13 min | Total 220 min (cold service)

Ingredients

- 500 ml pasteurized milk (about 2 US cups plus 2 tbsp), divided into 90 ml for slurry and 410 ml for heating
- 25 g cornstarch (about 3 tbsp), not cornmeal or wheat flour
- 40 g granulated sugar (about 3 tbsp plus 1/2 tsp), divided into 30 g for pudding and 10 g for fruit
- 5 ml vanilla extract (1 tsp)
- 0.3 g fine salt, a small pinch
- 200 g fresh strawberries (7 oz), washed, hulled and cut into 1 cm/3/8 in pieces
- 15 ml water (1 tbsp), for fruit
- 5 ml lemon juice (1 tsp), seeds removed

Set out

1000 W microwave with turntable, Kitchen scale and measuring jug, Spoon, Fork or small whisk, Oven mitts, Food thermometer used outside the microwave, Microwave-safe milk bowl, at least 2 L/about 2 1/8 US qt measured usable capacity and about 20 cm/8 in inside diameter, Microwave-safe fruit bowl, at least 1 L/about 1 US qt capacity, Microwave-safe vented fruit cover, Small slurry bowl, Knife and board, Four shallow heatproof pudding bowls, each at least 300 ml/about 1 1/4 US cups usable capacity, Shallow food-safe container for fruit topping, Refrigerator at 40°F/4°C or below

Allergens

Milk. Check labels and substitutions.

Make it

1. Whisk the cornstarch with 90 ml/6 tbsp cold milk in the small slurry bowl until smooth. Put the remaining 410 ml milk, 30 g sugar and salt in the 2 L bowl. Heat uncovered at 1000 W full power for 3-4 minutes, stirring after 2 minutes, until hot and steaming. Pause sooner if it rises.

2. Stir the slurry again and whisk all of it into the hot milk. Cook uncovered at 70% power in 30-second bursts, stirring gently but thoroughly after each, for about 2 minutes until thickened and coming to a full boil throughout. Then use 50% power for about 1-2 minutes more in attended 15-20-second intervals, stirring gently between them. Establish a clear full boil through the center as well as around the edge and complete at least 1 full minute of actual boiling; do not count stirring pauses or nonboiling warming toward that minute. Watch the roomy bowl closely and pause sooner if the mixture climbs. Give further short intervals as needed to complete the full boil, and follow any longer cornstarch-label cooking direction; extra heating extends the planning total. Stir in the vanilla and divide the entire base equally among the four shallow bowls.

3. Put the strawberries, remaining 10 g sugar and 15 ml water in the 1 L fruit bowl. Cover with a vent and microwave at full power for 3-5 minutes, stirring after 2 and 4 minutes, until the fruit is soft and the juices bubble. Stir in the lemon juice and transfer all the fruit and juices to the shallow topping container.

4. Allow heavy steam from the small pudding portions and fruit to subside for about 10 minutes, then cover and refrigerate promptly. Do not leave them on the counter to cool completely. Chill for about 3 hours, until 40°F/4°C or colder and the milk base is spoon-set; allow longer if needed. Divide all the cold fruit topping equally over the four puddings and serve.

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A starch set, not an egg custard

The full one-minute boil cooks and thickens the cornstarch. Warmth, cloudiness or a few edge bubbles do not complete this stage; use the center-and-edge full-boil check and actual label process in the method.

Keep the layers distinct

Chill the fruit separately and add it at serving. This avoids pouring acidic hot fruit into the starch base while it is setting.

Ingredient labels

Milk contains milk. Check cornstarch and vanilla labels for added ingredients or cross-contact. No egg or gelatin is used in the base formula.

A useful detail

The 220-minute cold-service plan allows 10 minutes of preparation, up to 8 minutes of milk/starch heating and 5 minutes of fruit heating, 10 minutes for steam to subside, 180 minutes of refrigeration and 7 minutes to portion and finish. One 1000 W microwave heats each stage sequentially. Full starch cooking and actual cold temperature control; the clock is not a guarantee of cooling performance.

Another way

Replace 200 g/7 oz strawberries with 200 g/7 oz fresh ripe peach flesh in 1 cm/3/8 in pieces. Give it the same complete tender-fruit cook, extending in short bursts if needed.

Replace vanilla with 1 g/about 1/2 tsp finely grated unwaxed lemon zest added after starch cooking. Keep the fruit’s measured 5 ml lemon juice unchanged.

Keep it well

Keep the cold puddings and topping at 40°F/4°C or below and use within 2 days or an earlier milk deadline. Add topping only to portions being served. Discard portions left out beyond 2 hours, or 1 hour above 90°F/32°C. This is a chilled dessert; no room-temperature storage or shelf-stable claim is made. Frozen berries require their full package process unless explicitly labeled ready to eat and are not assumed equivalent to the fresh fruit here.