Coffee Sweetened Milk Checkerboard

16 flat coffee/milk gelatin squares, about 2 in (5 cm) wide and ¾–⅞ in (2 cm) high; 8 two-square dessert portions · Active 50 min · Total 12 hr

Ingredients

• Unflavored powdered gelatin, 20 g total, divided 10 g coffee and 10 g milk, of specified setting strength

• ½ cup cold drinking water (120 ml), divided 60 ml per flavor

• 1½ cups freshly brewed plain decaffeinated coffee (360 ml), measured after brewing and divided

• 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon granulated sugar (30 g), for coffee

• 1¼ cups pasteurized whole milk (300 ml), divided

• ⅓ cup sweetened condensed milk (100 g), not evaporated milk

• ½ teaspoon vanilla extract (2.5 ml)

• ½ teaspoon neutral oil (2.5 ml), divided for wiping trays

Set out

Coffee brewing equipment, 2 matching small metal rectangular trays with internal bases about 8 x 4 inches (20 x 10 cm) and sides at least 1½ in (4 cm), each at least 750 ml capacity, Small saucepan washed between flavors, Mixing bowls and whisk, Food scale reading 0.1 g for gelatin and measuring jug, Thin knife and spatula, Paper towel, Food thermometer, Cold square serving platter at least 9 in (23 cm) wide, Refrigerator

Allergens

Milk. Check labels and substitutions.

Make it

1. Verify matching trays' internal bases/capacities, dry and oil lightly. Bloom 10 g gelatin over 60 ml cold water 5–10 minutes. Warm 180 ml brewed coffee with sugar to 140–150°F (60–65°C), remove from heat and dissolve bloomed gelatin in it. Add remaining 180 ml coffee. Pour into first tray.

2. In clean saucepan bloom remaining 10 g gelatin over 60 ml cold water 5–10 minutes. Add 150 ml milk and warm gently while stirring until dissolved, about 120–140°F (50–60°C); remove before boiling. Whisk in remaining 150 ml cold milk, condensed milk and vanilla. Pour into second tray. Both fills are roughly 2 cm deep; keep at least ½ inch (1.25 cm) below rims.

3. Cover trays and refrigerate at 40°F (4°C) or below at least 8 hours until firmly set. Allow 12 hours total including brewing, handling and a setting margin. Briefly dip only tray outsides in warm water about 100°F (38°C) for 5–8 seconds, dry and invert each onto a cold clean board. No water touches food.

4. Cut each 20 x 10 cm sheet into four equal sections along length and two across width, making 8 flat 5 cm squares per color. With thin spatula arrange 4 rows of 4 on cold platter, alternating brown/ivory and reversing starting color on each new row. Use all 16 squares, eight per color. Serve 2 squares per person (one each). Keep cold until service.

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Gelatin starting strength

Use food-grade unflavored powdered gelatin with a manufacturer benchmark of 7 g for about 2 cups (500 ml) plain liquid. Weigh the stated grams: envelope sizes and powder density vary. A flavored dessert packet, collagen peptides, sheet gelatin or agar is not an equal substitute.

Cold service

This is an original retro-inspired recipe, not a recovered 1960s formula. Gelatin is animal-derived; the vegetable ingredients do not make the dish vegetarian. A reliable refrigerator and the stated earlier ingredient deadlines are essential.

Ingredient labels

Read milk, condensed milk, coffee, extract and gelatin labels. Gelatin is animal-derived.

A useful detail

Coffee batch has 10 g gelatin with 60 ml water + 360 ml coffee and 30 g sugar, roughly 440 ml. Milk batch has 10 g gelatin with 60 ml water + 300 ml milk, 100 g condensed milk and vanilla, also roughly 440 ml. Matching 20 x 10 cm bases make flat sheets about 2 cm deep; no extra binder or sauce is included.

Keep it well

Keep covered at 40°F (4°C) or below. Use within 2 days of assembly or the earliest ingredient deadline, whichever comes first. Include the overnight setting period in that limit. Keep total unrefrigerated preparation and serving below 2 hours, or 1 hour above 90°F (32°C). Chill slices promptly after service; discard food exceeding those limits. Do not freeze; freezing damages the gel and releases water. Keep cut squares covered on a cold tray and return promptly to refrigerator while arranging; cutting does not reset their clock.