

Vanilla Bean Flan

- 1 ¼ c. milk
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- ¼ c. sugar
- 1 lg. egg
- 1 lg. egg yolk
- ¼ c. nonfat, sweetened condensed milk

Preheat oven to 350° .

Heat milk with vanilla bean halves in a small saucepan over moderate heat till hot. Remove from heat, cover, steep 20 minutes.

Cook sugar in a 6-inch nonstick skillet over medium-low heat, swirling skillet to help sugar melt evenly, until melted and pale golden. Continue to cook until deep caramel, 1-2 minutes. (I love this step! It smells like the State Fair while you're doing it ... you know, kind of like funnel cakes and cotton candy all at the same time! Be careful not to burn yourself!)

Immediately pour into (4) 5-6 oz. custard cups or ramekins, tilting cups to coat bottom. Let caramel cool.

Whisk together whole egg, yolk, condensed milk, and a pinch of salt until smooth. Discard vanilla bean pod from steeped milk and gradually whisk milk into egg mixture.

Divide custard among and bake in a water bath*, loosely covered with a sheet of foil, in middle of oven until custard is set but still trembles slightly, 35-40 minutes.

Remove cups from water bath and cool on a rack. Chill, uncovered, at least 2 hours. Unmold flans by running a knife around edges to loosen and inverting onto plates.

Flans can be made 1 day ahead and kept chilled in custard cups, uncovered.

*A water bath is simply setting your custard cups in a larger pan, and after you've filled them with the custard, pouring boiling water in the larger pan until it comes about halfway up the custard cups. This produces steam that helps keep the custard from 'crusting over' on the surface and bakes them more evenly. I usually put a kitchen towel in the bottom of my pan to keep the cups from sliding around. As long as it is soaked with the water, it is safe enough.

