

Cannoli Cream

Ricotta Cream

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

This cream is good not just as a filling for cannoli shells or cream puffs but also layered with fresh fruit as a spoon dessert. It can be made up to 24 hours before using.

- 2 pounds whole or part-skim milk ricotta, drained, if necessary (page 577)**
- 1½ cups confectioner's sugar**
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 2 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped (optional)**
- 2 tablespoons chopped candied orange peel or citron (optional)**

1 Put the ricotta in a food processor and blend it until creamy. Add the sugar, vanilla, and cinnamon and blend until smooth. Scrape the mixture into a bowl.

2 With a spoon or spatula, stir in the chocolate and candied fruit, if using. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Chocolate Cannoli Cream

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

To make black-and-white cannoli, fill one side of the cannoli tube with the vanilla filling above, and the other side with this chocolate filling. This is also good as a filling for layer cake or cream puff shells.

- 2 pounds whole or part-skim ricotta, drained if necessary (page 577)**
- 1½ cups confectioner's sugar**
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder**
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**

In an electric mixer or food processor, combine the ricotta, sugar, cocoa, and vanilla. Mix until smooth and well blended.

Cannoli

MAKES 16

At one time, cooks used lengths of cane or broom handles to make the molds to shape cannoli pastry shells. Now, inexpensive metal cannoli tubes are available at kitchenware shops, generally in sets of four. You can reuse them, but it is easier if you have at least eight to work with. Making the dough with a pasta machine ensures that the pastry shells will be thin and crisp.

1 recipe Chocolate or Vanilla Cannoli Cream

SHELLS

- 2 cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 tablespoon sugar**
- 1 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa powder**
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar**
- ¼ cup Marsala or dry white wine**
- 1 egg white, beaten**
- Vegetable oil for frying**
- ¼ cup chopped pistachios or candied cherries, for garnish**
- Confectioner's sugar**

1 Prepare the cream, if necessary.

2 Prepare the shells: In the large bowl of an electric mixer, combine the flour, sugar, cocoa, cinnamon, and salt. Stir in the oil, vinegar, and enough of the wine to make a soft dough. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead until smooth and well blended, about 2 minutes. Shape the dough into a ball. Cover with plastic wrap and let rest at room temperature at least 30 minutes.

3 Cut the dough into four pieces. Keep the remaining dough covered while you work. Starting at the middle setting, run one of the pieces of dough through the rollers of a pasta machine. Lightly dust the dough with flour as needed to keep it from sticking. Pass the dough through the machine repeatedly, until you reach the highest or second-highest setting. The dough should be about 4 inches wide and thin enough to see your hand through. (The dough can be rolled on a board with a rolling pin, but be sure to roll it very thin.) Cut the strip of dough into pieces about 1 inch shorter than your cannoli tubes.

4 Continue rolling out the remaining dough. If you do not have enough cannoli tubes for all of the dough, lay the pieces of dough on sheets of plastic wrap and keep them covered until you are ready to use them.

5 Oil the outside of the cannoli tubes. Place a cannoli tube crosswise from corner to corner on top of one piece of dough. Fold the two remaining corners of the dough around the tube, being careful not to stretch or pull it. Dab a little egg white on the dough where the edges overlap. (Avoid getting egg white on the tube, or the pastry will stick to it.) Press to seal. Set aside.

6 In a deep heavy saucepan, pour enough oil to reach a depth of 2 inches, or if using an electric deep-fryer, follow the manufacturer's directions. Heat the oil to 370°F on a frying thermometer, or until a small piece of the dough placed in the oil sizzles and browns in 1 minute. Have ready a tray lined with paper towels.

7 Carefully lower a few of the cannoli tubes into the hot oil. Do not crowd the pan. Fry the shells until golden, about 2 minutes, turning them so that they brown evenly.

8 With tongs grasp a cannoli tube at one end. Very carefully remove the cannoli tube with the open sides straight up and down so that the oil flows back into the pan. Place the tube on paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining tubes. While they are still hot, grasp the tubes with a potholder and pull the cannoli shells off the tubes with a pair of tongs, or with your hand protected by an oven mitt or towel. Let the shells cool completely on the paper towels.

9 Repeat making and frying the shells with the remaining dough. If you are reusing the cannoli tubes, let them cool before wrapping them in the dough.

10 To assemble the cannoli: Fill a pastry bag fitted with a 1/2-inch plain tip, or a heavy-duty plastic storage bag, with the ricotta cream. If using a plastic bag, cut about 1/2 inch off one corner. Insert the tip in the cannoli shell and squeeze gently until the shell is half filled. Turn the shell and fill the other side.

11 Sprinkle the ends with pistachios, or press a candied cherry into the cream. Serve within 3 hours.