



## French Vanille Crème

By Erin Fletter

**Prep Time 3 / Cook Time / Serves 4 - 6**

### Fun-Da-Mentals Kitchen Skills

**measure:** to calculate the specific amount of an ingredient required using a measuring tool (like measuring cups or spoons).

**whisk:** to beat or stir ingredients vigorously with a fork or whisk to mix, blend, or incorporate air.

### Equipment

- Small mixing bowl
- Dry measuring cups
- Measuring spoons
- Whisk

### Ingredients

#### French Vanille Crème

- 1/2 C cream cheese, room temperature **\*\***(for DAIRY ALLERGY: Omit for child with allergy OR sub 1/2 C dairy-free/nut-free cream cheese)
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract **\*\***(for CELIAC/GLUTEN ALLERGY use certified gluten-free pure vanilla extract, not imitation vanilla flavor—check label)**\*\***
- 2 tsp granulated sugar or honey

### Food Allergen Substitutions

#### French Vanille Crème

**Dairy:** For 1/2 C cream cheese, omit for child with allergy OR substitute 1/2 C dairy-free/nut-free cream

cheese.

**Celiac/Gluten/Wheat:** Use certified gluten-free pure vanilla extract, not imitation vanilla flavor.

## Instructions

### French Vanille Crème

#### measure + whisk

Have your kids measure and add **1/2 cup room temperature cream cheese, 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**, and **2 teaspoons sugar or honey** to a small mixing bowl. Then, whisk everything together. Practice counting to 5 in French while you whisk: 1 un (uhn), 2 deux (deuh), 3 trois (twah), 4 quatre (KAH-truh), 5 cinq (sank). Voilà! You have **French Vanille Crème** to drizzle over the top of Apple Cranberry Tarte Tatin Cups or other pastries!

## Featured Ingredient: Vanilla!

Hi! I'm Vanilla!

"I'm a flower, a flavor, an aroma, a spice, a seed, and a pod! Did you know that my pods come from a Vanilla orchid? For cooking, I can flavor foods by adding vanilla extract (much tastier than imitation vanilla) or vanilla paste (made from extract and ground seeds). You can also slice open a pod and scrape out the tiny black seeds to add to your dish, and steep the pod in liquid. I'm essential for baking (and ice cream)!"

### History & Etymology

Vanilla has an intriguing history. Because of its high value over time, vanilla has been the subject of historical robbery and great intrigue. Growers in Madagascar are known to "tattoo" their beans with a knife when the pods are still green so they can identify their beans if they suspect someone has stolen them. How they find the stolen beans is anyone's guess!

Vanilla is indigenous to southeastern Mexico and, in the 1500s, traveled to Spain. Initially, it was only valued for its use as perfume.

For hundreds of years, Mexico was the only country that grew vanilla. Now, Madagascar, an island country off the coast of Southeastern Africa, grows the most vanilla in the world.

Other places that produce vanilla are Costa Rica, Guatemala, Uganda, Kenya, China, India, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji, Tahiti, Hawaii, and other Pacific Islands. Find these places on your map! What do they all have in common? They are hot, tropical places where vanilla orchids can grow abundantly.

Why is vanilla so expensive even today? It's because growing vanilla is very labor-intensive. In fact, vanilla is the second most labor-intensive agricultural crop, next to saffron. It can take nearly three years after planting the vines before the first orchid flowers appear. Vanilla beans must remain on the vine for nine months before developing their sweet aroma. The beans are still green when growers harvest them. Then

they turn brown and become richly flavored during the drying and curing process.

We consume the most vanilla in the United States compared to any other place! However, the vanilla found in fragrances and foods is 98 percent imitation! This is because synthetic vanilla is less expensive than the real thing.

Only the Melipona bee in Central America can pollinate the vanilla flower. In other parts of the world, farmers mimic the process with wooden needles.

July 23rd is National Vanilla Ice Cream Day in the US.

The English word "vanilla" comes from the Spanish word "vainilla," meaning "little pod, the diminutive of "vaina," meaning "sheath" or "pod."

## Anatomy

Vanilla is a member of the orchid family and prefers hot, wet, tropical climates. Vanilla is also the only edible orchid (that we know of).

A climbing vine, vanilla grows whitish-green flowers that are hand pollinated. It requires supportive structures for optimal growth. Vanilla vines can grow anywhere from 30 to 50 feet long!

The fruit, when mature, is about five inches long, a half-inch thick, and looks like a bean pod.

The pod ripens gradually for 8 to 9 months after flowering, eventually turning black and giving off a strong aroma. Inside the cured vanilla bean pod are thousands of tiny vanilla seeds that are rich in flavor.

These seeds give vanilla bean ice cream its tiny black flecks, and it is how you know your vanilla ice cream is the real thing!

The vanilla orchid lasts only a day, and pollination needs to happen before it dies.

## How to Pick, Buy, & Eat

No two vanilla beans are the same in taste, color, or aroma, just like wine grapes.

Store vanilla beans away from heat or light.

To open a vanilla pod, place it on a flat surface. Press down at the top to hold it steady, then take a knife and split the pod down the middle. Next, spread apart the pod and run your knife down its length. The seeds will stick to the knife!

Use the empty vanilla pod to infuse a jar of sugar or salt. Or steep it in milk or cream to use in recipes! Or poach fruit with a vanilla bean to give it a subtle kiss of flavor.

A few drops of vanilla will balance a tomato's acidity.

Steep vanilla beans in coffee or tea, or grind them with your coffee beans for flavored java.

Spiders don't like vanilla! So, vanilla and vinegar in a spray bottle will send spiders running!

Try chopping up vanilla beans and mixing them with Epsom salts and a little vanilla extract for a luxurious bath.

One vanilla bean is equivalent to about three teaspoons of vanilla extract.

You can add vanilla to sweet and savory recipes. Try mixing some vanilla beans into a homemade salad

vinaigrette or poaching a vanilla bean in butter for a delicious sauce to serve over fish!

Vanilla extract is made by pounding vanilla pods in a solution of ethanol and water. Ethanol is a grain alcohol found in alcoholic beverages, but it is also used as a fuel additive, often blended with gasoline (especially corn-based ethanol). However, the ethanol manufactured for drinks and vanilla extract has to follow more purity standards than the type used in petroleum products.

## Nutrition

There are some claims of the health benefits of vanilla, such as reducing skin damage, aiding digestion, and alleviating nausea; however, there is not enough evidence to confirm these. Still, vanilla's pleasant fragrance may help calm and lift moods.