

Vera's Sherry Trifle

This is one dessert that I can clearly remember from my childhood – it probably even enticed me to be a chef. My mum always made this for special occasions and I just loved helping, especially with the cleaning of the bowls... Now I like to decorate the top with pomegranate seeds to make it sparkle like jewels.

200g (7oz) Madeira cake, broken into pieces
300ml (½ pint) cream
toasted flaked almonds, to decorate
pomegranate seeds, to decorate
spun sugar, to decorate (optional)

For the custard:

300ml (½ pint) milk
100ml (3½fl oz) cream
½ vanilla pod, split in half lengthways and seeds scraped out
5 egg yolks
4 tbsp caster sugar
2 tsp cornflour

For the fruit:

100ml (3½fl oz) sweet sherry
100g (4oz) caster sugar
½ vanilla pod, split in half lengthways and seeds scraped out
1 x 500g (18oz) bag of frozen fruits of the forest



1. To make the custard, put the milk, cream and vanilla pod and seeds in a heavy-based pan set over a gentle heat and cook until it nearly reaches the boil – but don't allow to boil. Meanwhile, put the egg yolks, sugar and cornflour in a large bowl and whisk together until pale and thickened.
2. Remove the hot milk and cream mixture from the heat and slowly whisk it into the egg mixture through a fine sieve until smooth. Discard the vanilla pod and pour back into the pan, then set over a gentle heat. Cook, without allowing it to boil, until the custard coats the back of a wooden spoon, stirring continuously. Remove from the heat and leave to

cool, covered with a piece of cling film pressed directly on the surface of the custard to prevent a skin from forming on top.

3. Meanwhile, prepare the fruit. Put the sherry in a large pan with the sugar and vanilla seeds and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 4–5 minutes, until syrupy, stirring occasionally. Stir in the frozen fruits of the forest and set aside until cooled, stirring occasionally. The fruits should defrost naturally in the hot syrup but still hold their shape.
4. Scatter the Madeira cake over the base of a 1.5 litre (2½ pint) glass serving bowl. Spoon over the fruit and cover with the cooled custard. Chill for 1 hour, until the custard sets a little firmer, or up to 24 hours is fine.
5. When ready to serve, whip the cream in a bowl until you have achieved soft peaks. Put spoonfuls on top of the custard, then gently spread with a palette knife or the back of a spoon to cover the custard completely (or you can use a piping bag). Sprinkle over the toasted flaked almonds and pomegranate seeds and decorate with some spun sugar if liked, then place straight on the table to serve.