

Excerpted from the book *“The Cuban Table: A Celebration of Food, Flavors, and History”* by Ana Sofia Peláez. Copyright © 2014 by Ana Sofia Peláez. Reprinted with permission from St. Martin's Press.

Flan de Leche

Serves 8 to 10

The trick to a great Flan de Leche begins and ends with the caramelo—the sugar heated slowly over a steady flame until it reaches just the right amber hue without becoming bitter. It can get away from you easily, but it's always fun to see how far you can take it.

For the mold

3/4 cup sugar

For the custard

2 1/2 cups whole milk

One 12-ounce can evaporated milk

1 1/2 cups sugar

1 whole cinnamon stick

1 whole vanilla bean, split lengthwise, or

1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract

1 lemon peel, white pith removed

1/8 teaspoon kosher salt

6 large eggs

Special equipment:

7- to 8-inch flanera or round metal cake pan (preferably 3 inches deep)

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Pour 3/4 cup of sugar into a *flanera* or metal mold. Place the mold over medium heat and move constantly, without stirring, until the sugar melts and takes on a deep amber hue, 5 to 8 minutes. Remove the mold from the heat and swirl the caramel so that the bottom and sides are lightly covered. The caramel will be very hot and should be handled carefully. Set aside.

Combine the whole milk, evaporated milk, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla bean, lemon peel and salt in a heavy 4-quart saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat. Remove the saucepan from the heat and allow the spices to steep until the milk is cooled to room temperature, about 30 minutes. Discard the cinnamon, vanilla bean, and lemon peel.

Combine the cooled milk mixture and eggs in a mixing bowl and whisk until well combined. Carefully pour the custard into the prepared mold. Close the lid of the *flanera*, if using, or cover the mold with aluminum foil.

Prepare a *baño de María*. Place the filled mold in a larger roasting pan. Pour enough hot water into the pan so that it comes about halfway up the sides of the mold. Carefully place both pans in the oven and bake for 60 to 75 minutes, until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean. Allow the custard to cool completely then refrigerate, covered, at least 4 hours or overnight.

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To unmold, run a thin knife along the side of the mold. Gently shake the mold to loosen the flan. Place a large plate over the flan and quickly invert the mold in one motion.

The flan will gently drop onto the plate and the caramel will flow out.