

Crab and Corn Pudding

In the early days of California cooking, savory puddings were often served, a reflection of the fact that eggs and dairy have historically been mainstays of the state's agriculture. That was a legacy from the mission padres who, in addition to growing field crops such as corn and beans, usually kept cows and chickens to help feed their communities. In Northern California, Dungeness crab season begins around the first of November. The crab lends rich taste and nice texture to this pudding.

2 tablespoons (1/4 stick) butter
1/2 cup minced shallots
1/4 cup minced seeded fresh poblano chili
12 ounces frozen corn kernels (about 3 cups), thawed
1 3/4 cups half and half
6 large eggs
3 tablespoons all purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon ground white pepper
1 1/2 cups (packed) fresh crabmeat (about 8 ounces)
4 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly butter eight 3/4-cup custard cups or soufflé dishes. Melt butter in heavy small skillet over medium heat. Add shallots and poblano chili; sauté until chili is tender, about 3 minutes.

Puree corn in processor. Add half and half and next 6 ingredients. Using on/off turns, process until mixture is smooth. Transfer to large bowl. Add crabmeat and chili mixture; stir to blend. (Can be made 8 hours ahead. Cover; chill.)

Divide custard among prepared cups. Sprinkle 1/2 tablespoon cheese over each. Place cups in large roasting pan. Pour enough hot water into pan to come halfway up sides of cups.

Bake until custards are set in center and knife inserted into center comes out clean, about 50 minutes.

Serves 8 as a first course or side dish