



# Portuguese Custard Tarts (Pasteis de Nata)



This slightly streamlined recipe for the world-famous pasteis de nata, or Portuguese custard tarts, uses just few basic ingredients but requires numerous steps and a certain amount of finesse. The results are so worth it, though, you'll want to make a double batch. The extra moisture inside the sticky dough, activated by a very hot oven, creates the signature flaky, buttery, crispy crust, which encases a custard subtly scented with lemon, cinnamon, and vanilla.

By Chef John

**Prep:** 1 hr

**Cook:** 25 mins

**Additional:** 2 hrs 35 mins

**Total:** 4 hrs

**Servings:** 12

**Yield:** 12 tarts



## Ingredients

### For the Dough:

1 cup all-purpose flour

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

⅓ cup cold water

1 stick high-quality unsalted butter, fully softened, divided

### For the Sugar Syrup:

¾ cup white sugar

¼ cup water

1 tablespoon water

1 cinnamon stick (Optional)

1 lemon, zested in large strips (Optional)

## Directions

### Step 1

Combine flour, salt, and cold water in a bowl. Mix with a wooden spoon until dough just comes together and pulls away from the sides of the bowl. Dough should be sticky; adjust with more flour or water to achieve what's shown in the video.

### Step 2

Transfer dough onto a well floured surface. Dust a little more flour over the top. Knead for a minute or two to form a round. Cover and let rest for 15 to 20 minutes.

### Step 3

Roll dough into a square about 1/8 inch thick, dusting with flour as necessary; dough should still be sticky.

### Step 4

Spread 1/3 of the butter over 2/3 of the square using a silicone spatula, leaving a 1/2 inch border. Flip the unbuttered side over the middle of the square and fold the opposite end over it like a letter. Straighten the edges as needed.

### Step 5

Turn dough with a bench scraper to unstick it from the counter; dust with flour. Flip and sprinkle more flour on top. Roll dough into a 1/8-inch-thick rectangle, carefully stretching edges as needed. Spread another 1/3 of the butter over 2/3 of the dough. Fold into thirds.

**For the Custard Base:**

1/3 cup all-purpose flour

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

1 1/2 cups milk

6 large egg yolks

1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
(Optional)

Transfer onto a lined baking sheet and freeze until butter is slightly chilled, about 10 minutes.

**Step 6**

Sprinkle dough with flour and roll into a square a little over 1/8 inch thick. Spread remaining butter over the dough, leaving a 1- to 1 1/2-inch border on the top edge. Dip your finger in water and lightly moisten the unbuttered edge. Roll dough into a log starting from the bottom edge. Dust with more flour and polish the ends as needed. Seal with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 2 hours, preferably overnight.

**Step 7**

Combine sugar, 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon water, cinnamon, and lemon zest in a pot. Boil over medium heat, without stirring, until syrup reaches 210 to 215 degrees F (100 degrees C). Remove from heat.

**Step 8**

Preheat oven 550 degrees F (288 degrees C). Grease a 12-cup muffin tin.

**Step 9**

Whisk flour, salt, and cold milk together very thoroughly in a cold pot. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until milk thickens, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool for at least 10 minutes.

**Step 10**

Whisk egg yolks into the cooled milk. Add the sugar syrup and vanilla extract. Mix until combined. Strain custard into a glass measuring cup.

**Step 11**

Unwrap the dough and trim any uneven bits on the ends. Score log into 12 even pieces using a knife; cut through.

**Step 12**

Place a piece of dough in each muffin cup. Dip your thumb lightly in some cold water. Press thumb into the center of the swirl; push dough against the bottom and up the sides of the cup until it reaches least 1/8 inch past the top. Fill each cup 3/4 of the way with custard.

**Step 13**

Bake in the preheated oven until the pastry is browned and bubbly, and the tops start to blister and caramelize, about 12 minutes. Cool tarts briefly and serve warm.

**Chef's Notes:**

You'll have to decide whether you're going to include lemon, cinnamon, and vanilla, which are apparently considered optional ingredients in Portugal, but I really enjoy the flavor, and wouldn't change a thing.

**Tips**

You can substitute the cinnamon stick with 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon.

**Nutrition Facts**

**Per Serving:** 210 calories; protein 3.9g; carbohydrates 25.2g; fat 10.6g; cholesterol 125.2mg; sodium 98.3mg.

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