

SWEET CORN BRÛLÉE

IN THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF OUR MARRIAGE, WHENEVER KATHY AND I ATE OUT, WHEN the waiter would wrap up the meal and give us that “Dessert, anyone?” look, I’d always ask, “Do you have crème brûlée?” It was always a happy treat when they did—it’s crunchy, it’s creamy, it’s really dreamy. The magic part was the crunchy sugar crust on top.

For one birthday Kathy bought me a butane kitchen torch so I could make brûlées of my own. Some people might be intimidated by holding a 1,430°F flame thrower in their kitchen, but not me. One summer in college my dad got me a job working with a plumber, learning how to use a torch to sweat and solder pipes . . . a skill I’d use later to artfully burn sugar on top of my fancy French custard!

Fast-forward almost thirty years, for Kathy’s birthday we went to one of her favorite restaurants, 1000 North in Jupiter, Florida. She didn’t know I’d called Ira Fenton, who runs the place, to secretly order her favorite birthday carrot cake from her favorite bakery. When we arrived, the staff discreetly gave me *the nod* that signaled the cake was in the cooler. *Shhhhhh!*

Towers of seafood, 36-ounce tomahawk rib eyes . . . their menu is amazing. But that night they had something new on the menu that immediately caught my eye.

“Corn brûlée?” I asked our waiter, “Is that a side dish, like crème brûlée—with corn?”

It was! Of course I ordered it. Not only was it delicious, it was downright *brilliant*. The corn was creamy, like crème brûlée, and the crunchy sugar on top made the sweet corn a little sweeter. Win-win.

On our way out I complimented Ira on the corn brûlée. “I have it every meal,” he said. If I were the boss, I would, too! He sent me their recipe for this dish, which was pretty involved, because they’re one of Florida’s best restaurants and they’re able to spend all day making it perfect. So Kathy and I came up with this easy version—one that doesn’t require a butane torch to make the crunchy top. All you have to do is turn on the oven!

Thanks for the great idea, 1000 North! We went for the cake and fell in love with the corn.

Makes 8 servings



2 tablespoons unsalted butter
½ cup finely diced sweet onion
2 large garlic cloves, sliced
½ cup whole milk
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon granulated sugar
½ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup shredded Cheddar cheese
1 large egg, whisked
Two 15.25-ounce cans whole kernel corn, drained
One 4-ounce can diced chiles, drained
Turbinado cane sugar, for topping



1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Grease a 1-quart baking dish (a 6 × 9-inch dish works great).
2. In a large skillet, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add the onion and garlic and sauté until they have some golden highlights, 5 to 8 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, measure the milk in a large measuring cup, add the flour, granulated sugar, salt, and pepper, and whisk well.
4. When the onion and garlic have those golden highlights, pour in the milk mixture and whisk to create a roux. Whisking constantly, let it bubble for about a minute, then remove from the heat. Quickly mix in the Cheddar and then mix with the egg for a moment. Once completely incorporated, quickly add the corn and diced chiles and mix well.
5. Pour into the prepared baking dish and level it out smoothly. Make sure there are no errant kernels sticking up or they will burn in the oven. Clean up the sides with a paper towel.
6. Bake until you see bubbling up along the sides of the dish and the top of the casserole has taken on a dull glossiness, about 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and let it rest 30 minutes to cool down.
7. To make the brûlée magic happen, sprinkle turbinado sugar over the casserole to form a thin but consistent layer. Make sure every kernel is covered; poke them under the sugar if needed or they will burn a little. Set the dish on the top rack of a *cold* oven and turn on the broiler. Broil for 6 to 9 minutes, checking very often by opening the door to make sure nothing is burning. You’ll know you’re getting close when you can smell the sugar as it brûlés. It will caramelize unevenly in the beginning; quickly and carefully rotate the baking dish and keep it under the broiler until the entire top of sugar has turned deep golden.
8. Remove from the oven and let it sit about 5 minutes to harden the brittle sugar crust. If you notice a few dark spots form on the top, that’s okay. Some of the corn kernels are going to poke their heads out—it happens!
9. When cooled, serve it up! Just know this is best the day it’s prepared, because the sugar brûlée crust on the top will soften overnight and the effect won’t be the same. So enjoy it at once—it’s sweet and savory and oh so tasty!