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GOURMET WHIPPED CREAM

If want to dress up a simple dessert or have a fantastic one you want to make even more amazing, think whipped cream. If you've only had 'traditional' whipped cream, there is a world of flavors waiting to be discovered.

Gourmet whipped cream is surprisingly simple to make and compliments any sweet or savory treat you may be serving. It can also be added to coffee to give it a creamy twist.

Whether you are hosting an intimate dinner party or an event for hundreds, creating a whipped cream bar adds an unexpected element of fun and allows guests to treat themselves to a variety of flavors. So, as you create your next menu, consider including this fun, unexpected and inexpensive addition. Guests will thank you for it!

Things good cooks know about making awesome whipped cream:

- Use cream labeled Heavy or Whipping Cream (or Heavy Whipping Cream). Light cream doesn't have enough fat to form the requisite peaks.
- Stick your bowl in the fridge for 30 minutes (or even 15 if you're in a hurry) before using. It will help the cream whip faster. Same goes for the cream. Take it out of the fridge right before you plan on using it.
- Both confectioners' sugar and regular sugar can be used as sweetener. The benefit of the former? It dissolves faster.

OK. Now let's get to the amped up version. Making flavored whipped cream starts the same way as making regular whipped cream: place your heavy cream in a bowl and beat or whisk it until soft peaks form. At this point, you add your extra flavors and your sugar. Extracts, like vanilla, almond, or lemon, are a possibility. Booze works too, and spices are fair game. One thing to keep in mind is how sweet your add-in is on its own. Maple syrup doesn't need extra sugar, but almond extract does.

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All the recipes below start with 1 cup of heavy cream whipped until soft peaks form.

Maple Whipped Cream: Add 2 tablespoons maple syrup (Grade B if possible) and 1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract. Beat until stiff peaks form.

Vanilla Whipped Cream: Add 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract (again, this is the flavor of the cream, so use the best!) and 1 tablespoon powdered sugar. Beat until stiff peaks form.

Cinnamon Spice Whipped Cream: Add 2 tablespoons powdered sugar, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, and 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg. Beat until stiff peaks form.

Chocolate Whipped Cream: In a double boiler or the microwave, melt 3/4 cup bittersweet chocolate chips. Let chocolate cool until still liquid but not hot, about 5 minutes. Add 1/2 chocolate mixture and beat until combined. Add remaining chocolate and 1 tablespoon sugar and beat until stiff peaks form.

Jimmy's Chocolate Mousse: Add 1 teaspoon instant coffee, 5 tablespoons instant cocoa, 1-2 tablespoons Cognac or Brandy, 3 tablespoons powdered sugar and beat until stiff peaks form.

Almond Whipped Cream: Add 1 tablespoon powdered sugar and 1/2 teaspoon almond extract and beat until stiff peaks form.

Patty's Rum Cream Coffee Topping: Add 3 tablespoons of powdered sugar, 3 tablespoons Rum, 3 tablespoons Kahlua Coffee liqueur and beat until stiff peaks form.

Leslie's Hazelnut Cream Coffee Topping: Add 3 tablespoons Frangelico Hazelnut liqueur, 3 tablespoons Kahlua Coffee liqueur, 3 tablespoons powdered sugar and beat until stiff peaks form.

Amaretto Vienna Coffee Topping: Add 6 tablespoons Amaretto, 3 tablespoons powdered sugar and beat until stiff peaks form.

Low Carb "Atkins Diet" Whip Cream: Add 3 teaspoons (or to taste) Splenda or other Sugar Substitute and 1 teaspoon Vanilla and beat until stiff peaks form.

You can experiment with any number of different liqueurs or citrus zests to create some of the most wonderful and delicious whipped and frothy coffee toppings you can imagine!

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