



**Vanilla Buttermilk Panna Cotta
with Southwestern Strawberry Mash or Rhubarb Compote**

Panna Cotta

1-1/2 cups heavy cream
2 cups buttermilk
10 tablespoons granulated sugar
1/2 vanilla bean, split
2 teaspoons gelatin
4 teaspoons cold water

Southwestern Strawberry Mash

1 pint strawberries
1/2 Tablespoon granulated sugar
1 prickly pear, peeled, sliced

Rhubarb Compote

3 cups rhubarb cut in 1-inch segments
1/2 cup water
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 vanilla bean, split

Garnish: fresh strawberries, mint leaves as desired

In a saucepan, heat the cream, buttermilk, sugar, and scraped vanilla bean seeds until boiling. Meanwhile, dissolve the gelatin by slowly sprinkling it over cold water; set aside until moisture is absorbed. Stir the softened gelatin into the hot liquid; mix well. Pour into 6 or 8 dessert glasses or small bowls; chill in refrigerator.

To Prepare Southwestern Strawberry Mash: Remove strawberry stems; chop strawberries into large bowl, sprinkle with sugar. With a potato masher, smash the strawberries. Stir prickle pear slices into soft mixture; strain to remove seeds. Discard seeds; stir juice into strawberries. Chill in refrigerator.

To Prepare Rhubarb Compote: In a medium saucepan combine the rhubarb, water, sugar, and scraped vanilla bean seeds. Cook over medium heat until rhubarb begins to soften and break down, about 5 minutes. Turn off heat; chill in refrigerator until serving.

To Serve: spread strawberry mash or rhubarb compote over the top surface of chilled panna cotta. If desired, combine strawberries and rhubarb for the topping. Garnish dessert with fresh strawberry and/or mint leaves. Yield: 6 to 8 desserts

Recipe Inspired by: Gale Gand, executive pastry chef and partner of Tru in Chicago and Cenitare Restaurants in Wheeling, shared a recipe for Panna Cotta. She is the author of six cookbooks and was named outstanding pastry chef by The James Beard Foundation.

<http://www.chicagobotanic.org/chef/chefrecipes/galegand>

About the Recipe: This dessert features a delicious vanilla flavored Panna Cotta served with fresh strawberries, that I flavored with the sweet juice of a prickly pear, or a compote of lightly tart rhubarb. You can top it with either fruit or mix up your own combination of delightful flavors.