



Chef Damon Little



Tapioca Recipe:

Two 13½ fluid ounce cans
of coconut milk
¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons
small pearl tapioca
Two stalks of lemongrass,
bruised and cut up
2 or 3 star anise pods
lightly crushed
1 tablespoon of vanilla
extract
¼ cup of sugar
1 inch knob of ginger, peeled
and sliced
1 teaspoon of salt
Juice of one lemon or lime

*Coconut Tapioca Pudding
with Fresh Fruit*





Coconut Tapioca Pudding with Fresh Fruit

This has become one of my most recent go-to deserts for when I don't know exactly what dietary restraints my guests have. It's vegan and gluten-free which covers most people, but who would care? It's just really delicious; plus, I just really love tapioca. You can top with any fruit you like, and mango would be an obvious choice since this dessert has a clear mango sticky rice vibe. I often use fresh local strawberries or pitted cherries, cut up and tossed with a little sugar and salt and left to hang out and form a syrupy sauce, similar to what you might do for strawberry shortcake.

First things first: let's infuse some flavor into the coconut milk. Empty the two cans of coconut milk into a sauce pan; add the lightly crushed star anise. Bruise the lemongrass with the back of a heavy knife or rolling pin; pound it until the fibers start to split, then slice it into rounds and add to the coconut milk. Do the same with the ginger root.

Bring the coconut milk to a simmer, then remove from heat and let stand to infuse flavor, 20 minutes to an hour depending on your taste. Strain the coconut milk through a fine mesh sieve, using the back of a spoon to press and squeeze the milk out of the lemongrass and ginger fibers.

Return the strained coconut milk to the saucepan, add the sugar and salt and return to a simmer. Add the tapioca pearls to the simmering liquid while whisking. Continue to whisk, being careful to scrape the bottom of the pan, while cooking the tapioca pearls until they become translucent and the mixture thickens slightly. I spoon out some of the pearls and look very closely at them; the pearls become translucent from the outside in.

Remove from heat when the tapioca is either fully translucent or there's just a little speck of opaque white in the center of the pearls. This should take anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes depending on the brand of tapioca, the pearl size, and how hot you're cooking it.

Whisk in the vanilla extract and lemon or lime juice. Taste, and add sugar or salt if needed. Pour into serving bowl or individual 4 ounce mason jars and refrigerate to set.

I usually cover them with the cut fruit just before serving, but this can be done ahead of time as long as the tapioca has been fully cooled and set.

