

## Golden Vanilla Bean Caramels

<http://userealbutter.com/2008/12/11/vanilla-bean-caramels-recipe/>

*slightly modified from Pure Dessert by Alice Medrich*

1 cup golden syrup (I used light corn syrup)  
2 cups sugar  
3/8 tsps fine sea salt  
2 cups heavy cream  
1 1/2 tsps pure ground vanilla beans, purchased or ground in a coffee or spice grinders,  
or 1 tbsp plus 1 tsp pure vanilla extract (I used one whole vanilla bean and 1 tbsp vanilla  
extract)  
3 tbsps unsalted butter, cut into chunks, softened

Line the bottom and sides of the baking pan with aluminum foil and grease the foil. Combine the golden syrup, sugar, and salt in a heavy 3-quart saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring with a silicone spatula or wooden spoon, until the mixture begins to simmer around the edges. Wash the sugar and syrup from the sides of the pan with a pastry brush dipped in water. Cover and cook for about 3 minutes. (Meanwhile, rinse the spatula or spoon before using it again later.) Uncover the pan and wash down the sides once more. Attach the candy thermometer to the pan, without letting it touch the bottom of the pan, and cook, uncovered (without stirring) until the mixture reaches 305°F (288°F at 8500 feet). Meanwhile, combine the cream and ground vanilla beans (I split my vanilla bean lengthwise, scraped out the seeds, and dumped both seeds and pod into the cream) in a small saucepan and heat until tiny bubbles form around the edges of the pan. Turn off the heat and cover the pan to keep the cream hot. Remove the vanilla pod right before using the cream (rinse off the pod and use it for other things).

When the sugar mixture reaches 305°F (nominally 288°F at 8500 feet, but be sure the sugar turns amber), turn off the heat and stir in the butter chunks. Gradually stir in the hot cream; it will bubble up and steam dramatically, so be careful. Turn the burner back on and adjust it so that the mixture boils energetically but not violently. Stir until any thickened syrup at the bottom of the pan is dissolved and the mixture is smooth. Continue to cook, stirring occasionally, to about 245°F (228°F at 8500 feet). Then cook, stirring constantly, to 260°F (I say 230°F at my elevation) for soft, chewy caramels or 265°F (240°F at 8500 feet); for firmer chewy caramels.

Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the vanilla extract, if using it (yes, I stirred in 1 tbsp of vanilla extract). Pour the caramel into the lined pan. Let set for 4 to 5 hours, or overnight until firm. If you are making hard caramels, I suggest chopping the caramels when they are still warm, but solid (maybe wait an hour).

Lift the pan liner from the pan and invert the sheet of caramel onto a sheet of parchment paper. Peel off the liner. Cut the caramels with an oiled knife. Wrap each caramel individually in wax paper or cellophane. Makes about 81 1-inch caramels.

*variations*

**Fleur de Sel Caramels:** Extra salt, in the form of fleur de sel or another coarse flaked salt, brings out the flavor of the caramel and offers a little ying to the yang. Add an extra scant 1/4 teaspoon of coarse sea salt to the recipe. Or, to keep the salt crunchy, let the caramel cool and firm. Then sprinkle with two pinches of flaky salt and press it in. Invert, remove the pan liner, sprinkle with more salt. Then cut and wrap the caramels in wax paper or cellophane.

**Nutmeg and Vanilla Bean Caramels:** Add 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg to the cream before you heat it.

**Cardamom Caramels:** Omit the vanilla. Add 1/2 teaspoon slightly crushed cardamom seeds (from about 15 cardamom pods) to the cream before heating it. Strain the cream when you add it to the caramel; discard the seeds.