

1.8: Sauces

Sauces enhance desserts by both their flavor and their appearance, just as savory sauces enhance meats, fish, and vegetables. Crème anglaise, chocolate sauce, caramel sauce, and the many fruit sauces and coulis are the most versatile. One or another of these sauces will complement nearly every dessert.

Examples of dessert sauces

Caramel sauce: A proper caramel flavor is a delicate balance between sweetness and bitterness. As sugar cooks and begins to change color, a flavor change will occur. The darker the sugar, the more bitter it will become. Depending on the application for the finished caramel, it can be made mild or strong. At this point, a liquid is added. This liquid will serve several roles: it will stop the cooking process, it can add richness and flavor, and it will soften the sauce. The fluidity of the finished sauce will depend on the amount of liquid added to it, and the temperature it is served at. Dairy products, such as cream, milk, or butter, will add richness; use water for a clear sauce; use fruit purées to add different flavor elements.

- **Chocolate sauce:** Sometimes called fudge sauce, chocolate sauce is generally made from cream (or milk), butter, and chocolate, and can be served hot or cold. The proportion of each of the ingredients will affect the thickness of the final product.
- **Compote:** French for “mixture,” a compote is cooked fruit served in its own cooking liquid, usually a sugar syrup. Compotes can be made with fresh, frozen, or dried fruits, and served hot or cold.
- **Coulis:** French for “strained liquid,” a coulis is most often an uncooked, strained purée. Flavors remain pure, and the colors bright. One of the drawbacks of using a coulis is that it may separate quickly when used as a plating sauce. It’s best to use à la minute.
- **Crème anglaise:** French for “English custard,” crème anglaise is a rich, pourable custard sauce that can be served hot or cold over cake, fruits, or other desserts. Made with eggs, sugar, and milk or cream, it is stirred over heat until it thickens into a light sauce. However, it’s a delicate operation: too much heat turns it into scrambled eggs! It should not get above 85°C (185°F) during the cooking process. Vanilla is the classic flavoring, but coffee, spices, chocolate, or liqueurs can be added. With additional yolks and heavy cream, it becomes the “custard” used for French ice cream. With additional yolks, gelatin, whipped cream, and flavoring, it becomes Bavarian cream.
- **Curd:** A curd is creamy and fruit based, with citrus and berry flavors being the most popular. Made from fruit juices, eggs, butter, and sugar cooked in a process similar to crème anglaise, curds can be thick, pourable sauces or spreads.
- **Fruit butter:** Fruit butter is a spread made from whole fruits, cooked, reduced, and puréed (if you don’t want any chunks in it) until very thick. It does not contain any butter; the term refers to the consistency.
- **Fruit sauce:** A fruit sauce is a fruit purée, cooked and thickened with a starch. It is normally served cold.
- **Hard sauce:** This traditional sauce for Christmas pudding, or any steamed pudding, is made by combining butter, sugar, and flavorings, often liqueurs. It is normally piped into shapes and chilled, then placed on the warm dessert just before serving.
- **Sabayon:** Sabayon is a mixture of egg yolks, flavoring, and sugar beaten over simmering water until thick, then beaten until cool. It is traditionally flavored with sweet white wine or liquor, then served over fresh fruit and grilled (when it is called a gratin). The Italian version of this is called zabaglione and is flavored with Madeira wine.
- **Whipped cream:** This very popular dessert topping can be served plain, sweetened, or flavored. Crème chantilly, a classic version of this, is a combination of whipped cream, sugar, and vanilla.

Applying dessert sauces

Except in the case of some home-style or frozen desserts, sauces are usually not ladled over the dessert because doing so would mar the appearance. Instead, the sauce is applied in a decorative fashion to the plate rather than the dessert. Many different styles of plate saucing are available.

Pouring a pool of sauce onto the plate is known as flooding. Although plate flooding often looks old-fashioned today, it can still be a useful technique for many desserts. Flooded plates can be made more attractive by applying a contrasting sauce and then blending or feathering the two sauces decoratively with

a pick or the end of a knife. For this technique to work, the two sauces should be at about the same fluidity or consistency.

Rather than flooding the entire plate, it may be more appropriate for some desserts to apply a smaller pool of sauce to the plate, as this avoids overwhelming the dessert with too much sauce.

A variation of the flooding technique is outlining, where a design is piped onto the plate with chocolate and allowed to set. The spaces can then be flooded with colorful sauces.

A squeeze bottle is useful for making dots, lines, curves, and streaks of sauce in many patterns. Or just a spoon is needed to drizzle random patterns of sauce onto a plate. Another technique for saucing is applying a small amount of sauce and streaking it with a brush, an offset spatula, or the back of a spoon.

Sauces are a great way to highlight flavors. Choose ones that will create balance on the plate, not just for color, but with all the components. A tart berry sauce will complement a rich cheesecake or chocolate dessert because sourness (acid) will cut through fat, making it taste lighter than it is. A sweet sauce served with a sweet dessert will have the overall effect of hiding flavors in both. Hold back on sweetness in order to intensify other flavors.

Many modern presentations may have a minimal amount of sauce. Sometimes this is done just for aesthetic reasons and not for how it will complement the dessert. Think of the dish and the balance of the components. This is the most important factor: flavor first, presentation second.

This page titled [1.8: Sauces](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Sorangel Rodriguez-Velazquez](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.