

Berry Brûlée Oatmeal

It is currently 10 degrees F as I am writing this. There is about 6 inches of cold, frozen snow on the ground and as I am sitting here freezing I'm thinking about breakfast. I would usually do a smoothie or yogurt, but when I look outside the window the last thing I want is something cold. No, I need hot and comforting.

Oatmeal is a favorite breakfast of mine, although it can be boring, I won't lie. There's something about a piping hot bowl of oatmeal on a cold winter day, and since it gets pretty cold here in the winter, I'm often trying different methods and ingredients to make it less mushy, less bland, and just more exciting. This is one of my favorite ways to eat it.

My go to method of cooking oats is to use a combination of rolled oats and steel cut. If you've never had steel cut, they are heartier, chewier, and more grain like, but they take longer to cook. By mixing them with rolled, you still get a little bit of creaminess, no mushy, porridge like oatmeal, and all in about 10 minutes.

Of course, steel cut oats are still *oats*, so they still need jazzing up to make taste good. This recipe does that perfectly. It starts with toasting the oats in the pot before boiling them. You can do this in a dry skillet, but I've found a little fat is a better way to do it. My fat of choice here? You guessed it: extra-virgin avocado oil. The fragrant smell of the oil and toasty oats will get you excited for breakfast, I promise.

Once your oats are toasted, it's time to add your liquid. I use water here, and add milk later, because milk is easy to burn. So here's what I've learned about getting the perfect texture to these oats. Once you add the water, resist stirring. Don't stir them at all. Bring to a simmer, set a time for 12 minutes, and wait.

After 12 minutes, turn off the heat and you can add flavorings, fruit, nuts, whatever you want and stir.

The real magic of this recipe comes at the end. One of my favorite desserts is crème brûlée, that silky custard that comes with the crackly sugar top. A few years ago, someone got me a torch so I could make it at home. I did once or twice, but really, who makes fancy desserts at home unless they have dinner parties and stuff? So the torch sat around never used until I realized you can torch other foods, such as cheesy things, French toast, and in this case, plain old oatmeal.

If you don't have a torch, don't despair — you can get the same effect with the broiler in your oven. Just make sure to watch so it doesn't burn. Once you've brûléed your oatmeal, top it with more fruit, some fresh mint, nuts, or whatever you like.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons extra-virgin avocado oil

1/2 cup rolled oats

1/2 cup steel cut oats
3 cups water
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
1 cup mixed berries, or other fruit
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
Honey or other sweetener, to taste
Milk, to serve, optional
Coarse sugar

Directions:

In a medium saucepan, add the oil and heat to medium high. Add the oats and stir until coated. Stir and cook for about 5 minutes, until the oats begin to brown and smell toasty.

Add the water and salt, and without stirring the oats, bring it to a simmer. Simmer for 12 minutes and turn off heat.

Add half of the berries, vanilla, and sweetener if desired. Stir until the berries kind of melt into the hot oats. Add milk if desired.

Divide the oats into 4 bowls. Sprinkle each with a teaspoon or two of sugar. If you have a torch, evenly torch the sugar until caramelized and browned. If not, preheat your broiler, and broil the oatmeal until top is browned.

Top with more berries before serving.