Breakfast / China

Chinese Steamed Egg Custard

Zhēng dàn — a savory custard so silky it trembles at the touch of a spoon, its surface smooth as polished jade, topped with a few drops of soy and sesame oil that pool into dark, fragrant islands.

Time 25 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 3 whole Large eggs
- ☐ 240 ml Warm water or dashi (around 60°C)
- ☐ 8 ml Light soy sauce (for custard)
- ☐ 1 pinch Fine salt
- ☐ 5 ml Light soy sauce (finishing drizzle)
- ☐ 3 ml Toasted sesame oil (finishing drizzle)
- ☐ 5 g Spring onion, finely sliced on the bias

Let's make it.

01 Beat the eggs gently with chopsticks using a side-to-side motion — the goal is full integration without incorporating air. Add the warm (not hot) water and soy sauce. The water must be warm, not boiling: hot liquid pre-cooks the proteins and cold water sets them unevenly. Beat gently to combine, then strain through a fine-mesh sieve into the steaming bowl or individual cups. The sieving is non-negotiable — it removes chalazae and bubbles that create pitting and air holes in the finished custard. Skim off any foam from the surface with a spoon and cover tightly with cling film to prevent condensation from dripping onto the surface.

02 Set up your steamer with boiling water but immediately reduce to the lowest possible simmer before adding the custard. The enemy of smooth custard is aggressive steam. Place the covered bowl in the steamer, then turn the heat down so only a whisper of steam circulates. Steam on low for 12–15 minutes. Do not open the lid more than once to check. The custard is done when it no longer sloshes as one liquid but jiggles as a unified, soft gel. If your stove cannot sustain low enough heat, crack the steamer lid open 1–2 cm to let excess steam escape — this keeps the temperature from climbing too high.

03 Remove the cling film carefully — the accumulated steam and condensation will roll off. Drizzle the finishing soy sauce and sesame oil across the surface in two or three passes — they will pool into dark, fragrant islands on the pale custard. Scatter the spring onion across the top. Serve immediately in the steaming bowl, scooping portions at the table with a spoon. The custard is best the moment it's made; it begins to weep liquid as it cools.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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