

## Bistro Backup

For this kind of cooking, all you need are sharp knives and the right cookware—the kind that holds in heat and looks good enough to bring right to the table. Here, stylish versions that won't dent your budget.

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### 1 MAKE THE CUT

For just \$30, you can buy a Chicago Cutlery Centurion three-piece set that includes an all-purpose eight-inch chef's knife (for thinly slicing onions and mincing garlic and parsley), a five-inch utility one (for cutting cheese and removing bones), and a small paring knife (for peeling apples and potatoes). All three perform just as well as made-in-France slicers that can set you back a couple of hundred bucks. Available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

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### 2 CASSEROLE CHIC

Every French bistro worth its salt serves classic dishes like steamed mussels and chicken in wine sauce directly from the well-weathered, colorful cast-iron casseroles they are simmered in. High-quality enameled Dutch ovens of this kind are in stores for as much as \$270 (for the six-quart size); get one just as good from the Lodge Color Collection for a low \$77.50 ([lodgemfg.com](http://lodgemfg.com)).

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### 3 CAFÉ CLASSIC

When bistro dining in France, you order a carafe of house wine for the table. The American household equivalent is wine from a box. Yet when you pour it from the Riedel Vivant decanter (\$20, Target), no one will even think to question its pedigree.

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### 4 PARLEZ-VOUS PRETTY?

Dishes like potato or vegetable gratins are designed to be served right from the oven. They can look gorgeous in traditional copper au gratin pans (that cost, yes, hundreds of dollars) or in a Le Creuset Stoneware oval dish. The one-and-a-half-quart size (\$30) is ideal. Call 877-273-8738 or visit [lecreuset.com](http://lecreuset.com).

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### 5 SMALL WONDERS

Ramekins are indispensable for baked desserts like our Crème Caramel, or for holding small amounts of prepped ingredients like parsley, cheese, or bread crumbs. A set of four Corningware French White seven-ounce ramekins is \$16 at Wal-Mart. Bon appétit! —*Sharon Franke*

sugar with cold water on medium until melted and a light caramel color, swirling pan occasionally. Immediately pour caramel into eight 6-ounce custard cups or ramekins.

3. In large bowl, with wire whisk, beat eggs, egg whites, and remaining  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup sugar until well blended. Beat in milk and vanilla. Pour custard mixture into custard cups.

4. Place cups in large roasting pan (17" by 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "); pour boiling water in pan until it comes halfway up sides of cups. Bake 40 minutes or until center of custard is just set. Remove custard cups from water in roasting pan; cool on wire rack. Cover and refrigerate 4 hours or until custard is well chilled.

5. To serve, with small spatula, carefully loosen custard from sides of cups. Invert each crème caramel onto dessert plate, tapping cup to help release custard. Leave inverted cup on plate for several minutes to allow caramel syrup to drip from cup onto custard.

**EACH SERVING** About 155 calories, 6 g protein, 29 g carbohydrate, 2 g total fat (1 g saturated), 0 g fiber, 57 mg cholesterol, 75 mg sodium.

## Potato & Leek Soup

**Prep** 15 minutes

**Cook** 28 minutes

**Makes** 6 first-course servings

**ReciTip** By cutting out the heavy cream in this recipe, we reduced both the total fat and saturated fat by 4 grams each and dropped the cholesterol by a not-too-shabby 24 milligrams.



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