

# The Washington Post

## Flour Girl: Pull Up to the Pump

I recently found a product in the baking aisle that intrigued me: pumpable vanilla paste. The South African spice company [NoMU](#) has come out with this convenient way to get concentrated flavor into your baking. Instead of scraping and steeping vanilla beans -- a lot of time and effort -- you simply pump the thick, syrupy paste. Knowing that it's made from as many as 50 to 100 hand-harvested Madagascar bourbon vanilla beans helps explain why the NoMU vanilla paste, housed in its light-blocking aluminum dispenser, costs \$19.99 for 3.38 ounces.



NoMU vanilla paste, in a pump dispenser.

Other companies also offer vanilla in paste form. [Nielsen-Massey](#) makes a similar product. What makes NoMU's paste different are its easy measurement (5 pumps equal 1 teaspoon) and no-mess dispenser.

To really let the [vanilla flavor](#) come through, I tested it in creme brulee. There are all sorts of bells and whistles you can add to the custard dessert, but I've always preferred the unadorned classic. When you mix cream, eggs, sugar and vanilla, it's pretty hard to get in the way of good.

The creme brulee recipe from Michel Roux's "[Eggs](#)" caught my attention because it doesn't use the usual bain-marie (water bath) to cook the custard cups, a technique that insulates the eggy custard from cooking too fast. Instead, Roux calls for a low oven temperature.

It worked like a charm. The finished brulees were not as firm as some I've had, but they definitely held together and had a silky mouthfeel. As for the vanilla paste: The proof really is in the pudding -- er, custard. A lot less trouble with a very deep, mellow, floral flavor.

When I make creme brulee, I use teacups instead of ramekins. Cups with handles are easy to hold and come in a great variety. If you don't have a culinary blowtorch (and, let's face it, most of us don't), you can run the cups under the broiler; no worries. Watch them carefully and pull them out as soon as the brulees start to crust and brown. Truth be told, there is no way to get an even, crackly crust without an aimed flame, but having used the blowtorch I inherited just once in the past three years, I can't say it's a kitchen necessity.

The NoMU vanilla paste is available at Whole Foods Market. The recipe for the creme brulee is after the jump.

-- Leigh Lambert