

Sugar-Free Pastel de Nata: Reinventing a Portuguese Icon

How to read this guide — Like all our articles, this one follows a three-part logic: the context, the existing solutions and their limits, then the Süvy answer.

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You can recognise a pastel de nata with your eyes closed. The flaky crust that cracks under the tooth, the smooth custard still warm, and above all that top speckled with brown, almost black, the signature of a caramelisation pushed to the extreme. This little Portuguese custard tart has become a gastronomic totem, sold from Lisbon to Hong Kong, from São Paulo to Singapore. Touching it feels almost like sacrilege. So when Süvy announces it is possible to remake it without sugar, the question is not "why?" but "how, without betraying it?"

In brief — The sugar-free pastel de nata is a version of the famous Portuguese custard tart in which sucrose is replaced by Süvy, a substitute based on erythritol and polydextrose. The technical challenge lies in the caramelised custard on top, which demands heat and browning. The Süvy formulation caramelises between 120 and 145 °C, doses 1:1 like sugar and retains water, which makes it possible to reproduce the crust, the custard and the brown speckling without raising blood sugar.

A monument no one dares to touch

Let us start by measuring what we are touching. The pastel de nata is not just another pastry. It is a national symbol.

Its history goes back to the early 19th century, in Belém, in the buildings adjoining the Jerónimos Monastery (Mosteiro dos Jerónimos). After the liberal revolution of 1820 and the closure of Portuguese convents in 1834, monks put small custard tarts up for sale to survive. In 1837 the Fábrica de Pastéis de Belém was born, and it has reproduced the "old and secret" recipe of the monastery ever since. Even today, that recipe is known only to a handful of master pastry chefs and is passed down in a sealed room, the "oficina do segredo", the workshop of the secret.

The success has never faltered. According to the Fábrica de Pastéis de Belém, the house sells more than 20,000 pastéis a day, with peaks beyond 50,000 in high season. Its reputation reaches far beyond Portugal. In December 2024, TasteAtlas named the pastel de Belém the best pastry in the world for 2025, and the pastel de nata tops its ranking of the best tarts in the world.

Its reach is global. The KFC chain turned it into a flagship product in Asia: according to the account reported by several media outlets, the brand is said to have sold around 300 million Portuguese-style "egg tarts" in China in the single year of 2010, served in more than 4,000 restaurants. Derivatives of the pastel de nata are eaten in Brazil, in Macao, in Taiwan, in Singapore, everywhere Portuguese pastry has travelled.

That is the weight of the object. A fixed recipe, protected, celebrated. The opposite of a playground.

Why the pastel de nata is an extreme test for a sugar

If you wanted to test a sugar substitute to breaking point, you would choose precisely this recipe. The pastel de nata combines three technical trials, each one formidable.

The first is the caramelisation of the top. The pastel's visual signature is those brown, almost burnt spots on the surface of the custard. They are obtained through a very short, very hot bake, often above 250 °C in professional ovens. Sugar plays a central role here: it browns, it caramelises, it gives that elegant bitterness that balances the richness of the custard. A sweetener that does not brown produces a pale custard, flat, immediately recognisable as "fake".

The second trial is the pastry cream itself. It must set, stay smooth, and neither crystallise nor weep water. Sugar structures the texture, holds the moisture and keeps the custard from turning grainy. Many substitutes fail here: they recrystallise on cooling and leave a sandy feel in the mouth.

The third is the puff pastry. It is not very sweet, but it has to stay crisp against a moist custard. Anything that changes the water retention of the filling affects the flakiness. A custard that weeps its water soaks the crust and ruins the contrast.

Three constraints, a single bite. It is this combination that makes the pastel de nata a true test. Succeeding at a dry biscuit without sugar is one thing. Succeeding at the same time at a high-temperature caramelisation, a stable custard and a preserved flakiness is another.

What the "lighter" versions already tried are worth

Before Süvy, several routes were explored to lighten the pastel. None really stands the comparison. Let us look at them head-on.

Simply cutting the sugar. You just lower the dose. The result: the custard loses its hold, the top no longer caramelises, and the pastel turns bland. You have removed pleasure without putting anything in its place. It is the most common false solution, and the most disappointing.

Intense sweeteners (sucralose, aspartame, stevia). They bring the sweet taste, sometimes with a bitter or liquorice aftertaste, but they weigh almost nothing. Yet in a pastry, sugar does not only sweeten: it gives volume, holds water, caramelises. An intense sweetener leaves a technical hole. The custard does not structure, the top stays pale.

Polyols used on their own. Maltitol keeps a slight browning power, but triggers a notable glycaemic response. Erythritol on its own does not caramelise easily and tends to recrystallise: you then get the familiar "cooling" effect in the mouth and the texture that crunches.

Fibres added without an overall logic. Adding inulin or a random fibre can improve the hold, but it throws off the taste and the bake if nothing is designed as a system.

The common thread of these failures is simple: they treat sugar as a single problem, taste, when it solves at least four at once. Taking the sugar out of a pastel de nata means removing a piece that was holding up all the rest. It is the same observation we made about [caramelisation in sugar-free pastry](#): browning is the hardest function to recover.

How Süvy reproduces the pastel without betraying it

This is where the formulation changes everything. Süvy is not just one more sweetener. It is the interlacing of two natural ingredients, erythritol (obtained from the fermentation of fruit) and polydextrose (a prebiotic plant fibre), designed to restore the functions of sugar, not only its taste. On an object as demanding as the pastel de nata, that difference shows up on the plate. Here is how, across the four uses that matter.

Usable everywhere, including on the hardest function: caramelisation. The pastel's sugar has to brown at very high temperature. Süvy caramelises between 120 and 145 °C, the ingredient staying thermally stable up to 145-150 °C. In practice, the top of the custard can take on those characteristic brown spots instead of staying pale. This is exactly the know-how we document for [sugar-free canelés](#), whose dark crust rests on the same principle.

No change to the recipe: the 1:1 dosing. The pastry chef relearns nothing. Where the recipe calls for 200 g of sugar, you put 200 g of Süvy. The sweetening power is identical. For a house that has protected a recipe since 1837, this point is decisive: you do not rewrite the formula, you substitute one ingredient.

A stable custard thanks to water retention. Süvy improves water retention and extends shelf life. In a pastry cream, this limits the recrystallisation and the water release that would soak the pastry. The flakiness keeps its crispness, the custard keeps its smoothness. The contrast of textures, the very heart of the pastel's pleasure, is preserved, as in our [sugar-free madeleines](#) where the crumb stays soft for several days.

No change of diet for the person eating it. Where a classic pastel is very sweet, the Süvy version shows a glycaemic index below 2, roughly eight times fewer calories than sugar (47.9 kcal per 100 g), and 43.2 g of fibre per 100 g. The tart remains a pleasure, but without the blood-sugar spike. It becomes compatible with type 1 or type 2 diabetes, a ketogenic or low-GI diet, without the person changing their habits or giving up the bite.

A word of honesty, because we do not oversell. Reproducing a pastel de nata with Süvy takes adjustment: oven temperature, caramelisation time, the balance of the custard. The result is not magic, it is technical. But it holds. Flaky crust, smooth custard, speckled top: the three trials are cleared together, something no lighter version had managed before. To understand where this mastery comes from, our [our story](#) page retraces the seven years of research by the Laboratoires Innovi.

Thousands of Süvy pastéis on their way around the world

Here is the backstage part, the one we are proud of. Thousands of pastéis de nata made with Süvy are destined to be tasted, in Portugal as well as abroad.

That figure says two things. First, that the technique has passed the test of the real world, not only that of the laboratory. You do not produce thousands of copies of an iconic pastry on a bet: you do it because the taste, the texture and the appearance are all there. Second, that the initial promise is verified: you can make an emblematic tradition evolve without betraying its soul.

It is a matter of principle for us. Süvy does not seek to replace the pastel de nata with something else. It seeks to preserve what makes the pastel de nata, the pleasure, the flakiness, the caramelised custard, by removing only the sugar. The difference is significant. You do not distort a monument, you write one more page in its history.

For a company born in Layrac, in the Lot-et-Garonne, helping a totem of Portuguese gastronomy evolve is no small thing. It is the same conviction that guides our other everyday recipes, from [sugar-free crêpes](#) to [sugar-free waffles](#): pleasure does not have to be sacrificed for health. Here, simply, the object carries a history of nearly two centuries. And to see it evolve without losing any of its soul is an honour we do not take lightly. πτ

FAQ

Does a sugar-free pastel de nata taste the same as the original? The goal is not to imitate roughly, but to reproduce the functions of sugar. With Süvy dosed 1:1, you find the sweet taste, the smooth custard and the caramelised top again. The difference lies mainly in the absence of a blood-sugar spike. A baking adjustment is still needed to get the characteristic brown speckling.

Why is the pastel de nata so hard to make without sugar? Because it combines three challenges: a very high-temperature caramelisation on top, a pastry cream that must stay stable, and a puff pastry that must stay crisp. Sugar fills all three functions at once. Removing it without replacing it with an equivalent ingredient makes the whole thing collapse.

How does Süvy caramelize when other sweeteners cannot? The erythritol and polydextrose formulation of Süvy caramelises between 120 and 145 °C and stays thermally stable up to 145-150 °C. This range allows browning, unlike intense sweeteners (stevia, sucralose) that only bring the sweet taste, without mass or a browning reaction.

Is the Süvy pastel de nata suitable for people with diabetes? With a glycaemic index below 2, Süvy does not raise blood sugar significantly. A pastel made with Süvy therefore becomes compatible with type 1 or type 2 diabetes, as well as with ketogenic and low-GI diets. In case of a medical condition, the advice of a health professional remains recommended.

Is the pastel de nata really recognised as the best tart in the world? The pastel de nata tops the ranking of the best tarts in the world established by TasteAtlas. In December 2024, the same guide named the pastel de Belém the best pastry in the world for 2025. These rankings are based on the votes of the platform's users.

Glossary

Pastel de nata — A small Portuguese custard tart made of puff pastry filled with an egg custard, baked at very high temperature to caramelize its surface.

Pastel de Belém — Name reserved for the pastéis produced by the Fábrica de Pastéis de Belém in Lisbon, following the secret recipe from the Jerónimos Monastery.

Oficina do segredo — "Workshop of the secret": the sealed room of the Fábrica de Pastéis de Belém where the original recipe is prepared by a handful of master pastry chefs.

Caramelisation — The browning of sugar under the effect of heat, producing colour, aromas and a slight bitterness. With Süvy, it occurs between 120 and 145 °C.

Erythritol — A polyol obtained by fermenting fruit with the micro-organism *Moniliella pollinis*. It brings a sweet taste without calories and without any effect on blood sugar.

Polydextrose — A soluble dietary fibre of plant origin, prebiotic and fermentable, which structures textures and retains water.

1:1 dosing — A property of Süvy that lets you replace sugar in equal quantity in a recipe, without changing its proportions.

Glycaemic index (GI) — A measure of how fast a food raises blood sugar. Süvy shows a GI below 2, against 70 for white sugar.

Water retention — The ability of an ingredient to keep the moisture of a preparation, which prolongs softness and limits recrystallisation.

Pastry cream — A cream based on milk, eggs and sugar, thickened during cooking, which fills the pastel de nata.

Aeration — The ability to incorporate air into a preparation (meringue, mousse). Süvy brings roughly 20% more aeration than sugar.

Polyol — A family of carbohydrates with partial sweetening power and low glycaemic impact, of which erythritol is a member.

Sources

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Süvy: when a Portuguese monument evolves without losing any of its soul

Reinventing a pastel de nata without sugar is proof that you can preserve the pleasure, the flakiness and the caramelised custard while removing only what weighs on blood sugar. Caramelisation at 120-145 °C, 1:1 dosing and water retention make it possible to evolve even the most emblematic traditions.

Süvy is the world's first sugar replacer, the fruit of 7 years of research by the Laboratoires Innovi. 100% natural, with no empty calories and no blood-sugar spike, it reproduces every function of sugar — taste, texture, caramelisation — without any of its drawbacks.
