



THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

A FOOD BLOG

Ultimate Banana Bread (from Cooks Illustrated)

I've reproduced Cooks Illustrated's recipe exactly below. However, I don't particularly care for the sliced bananas on top. They're pretty, but they're too sweet and candy-like (which really doesn't sound like me, come to think of it).

You can slightly healthy up this recipe by replacing half of the flour with whole wheat pastry flour, and using 4 tablespoons butter plus 2 tablespoons canola oil instead of 8 tablespoons butter. The oil helps keeps the loaf moist, and of course leaving all that butter in contributes flavor.

1 ¾ cups (8¾ ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon table salt
6 large very ripe bananas (about 2¼ pounds), peeled
8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
2 large eggs
¾ cup packed (5¼ ounces) light brown sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ cup walnuts, toasted and coarsely chopped (optional)
2 teaspoons granulated sugar

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 350 degrees. Spray an 8½ by 4½-inch loaf pan with non-stick cooking spray. Whisk the flour, baking soda, and salt together in a large bowl.
2. Place 5 bananas in a microwave-safe bowl; cover with plastic wrap and cut several steam vents in the plastic with a paring knife. Microwave on high power until the bananas are soft and have released liquid, about 5 minutes. Transfer the bananas to a fine-mesh strainer placed over a medium bowl and allow to drain, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes (you should have ½ to ¾ cups liquid).
3. Transfer the liquid to a medium saucepan and cook over medium-high heat until it's reduced to ¼ cup, about 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, stir the reduced liquid into the bananas, and mash with a potato masher until fairly smooth. Whisk in the butter, eggs, brown sugar, and vanilla.
4. Pour the banana mixture into the flour mixture and stir until just combined with some streaks of flour remaining. Gently fold in the walnuts, if using. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan. Slice the remaining banana diagonally into ¼-inch-thick slices. Shingle the banana slices on top of both sides of the loaf, leaving a 1½-inch-wide space down the center to ensure an even rise. Sprinkle the granulated sugar evenly over loaf.
5. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center of the loaf comes out clean, 55 to 75 minutes. Cool the bread in the pan on a wire rack for 15 minutes, then remove the loaf from the pan and continue to cool on a wire rack. Serve warm or at room temperature.