

Bananas Foster Bread Pudding with Vanilla Ice Cream and Caramel Sauce

Makes 10 to 12 servings

Bananas Foster was created at Brennan's, another classic New Orleans restaurant, in the 1950s when the city was a major port of entry for Central and South American bananas. The dish has become a global favorite through the years and I've enjoyed kicking it up in different preparations—from pie and ice cream to this bread pudding.

This dessert is New Orleans all the way—from the Creole-style bread pudding to the ultra-rich filling and a la mode ice cream topping.. And don't forget that the secret to a good bread pudding is to use day- old French bread.

9 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 1/2 cups packed light brown sugar
3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
6 firm-ripe bananas, peeled and cut crosswise into 3/4-inch-thick slices
1/4 cup banana liqueur
1/2 cup dark rum
4 large eggs, lightly beaten 3 cups heavy cream
1 cup milk
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Pinch of salt
6 cups 1/2-inch cubes day-old French bread
Vanilla Ice Cream
1 recipe Caramel Sauce; see below

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 10 x 14-inch baking dish with 1 tablespoon of the butter and set aside.

2. Melt the remaining 8 tablespoons butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add 1 cup of the brown sugar and the cinnamon and cook, stirring, until the sugar dissolves, about 2 minutes. Add the bananas and cook on both sides, turning, until the bananas start to soften and brown, about 3 minutes. Add the banana liqueur and stir to blend. Carefully add the rum and shake the pan back and forth to warm the rum and flame the pan. (Or, off the heat, carefully ignite the pan with a match and return to the heat.) Shake the pan back and forth, basting the bananas, until the flame dies. Remove from the heat and let cool.

3. Whisk together the eggs, the remaining 1/2 cup brown sugar, the cream, milk, vanilla, and salt in a large bowl. Add the cooled banana mixture and bread and stir to blend thoroughly. Pour into the prepared baking dish and bake until firm, 50 minutes to 1 hour. Cool on a wire rack for 20 minutes.

4. To serve, scoop the pudding onto dessert plates. Top each serving with a small scoop of vanilla ice cream, drizzle with caramel sauce, and serve immediately.

Caramel Sauce

Makes a generous 3/4 cup

We serve this sauce with many desserts at Delmonico, including the Bananas Foster Bread Pudding.

3/4 cup granulated sugar
2 tablespoons water
1/2 teaspoon lemon juice
1/2 cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons to 1/4 cup milk

Combine the sugar, water, and lemon juice in a medium heavy saucepan. Place over medium-high heat and cook, stirring, until the sugar dissolves. Let boil without stirring until the mixture becomes a deep amber color, 2 to 3 minutes, watching closely so it doesn't burn. Carefully add the cream or it may splatter, whisk to combine, and remove from the heat. Add the milk, 2 tablespoons at a time, until the desired consistency is reached. Remove from the heat and allow to cool before using.