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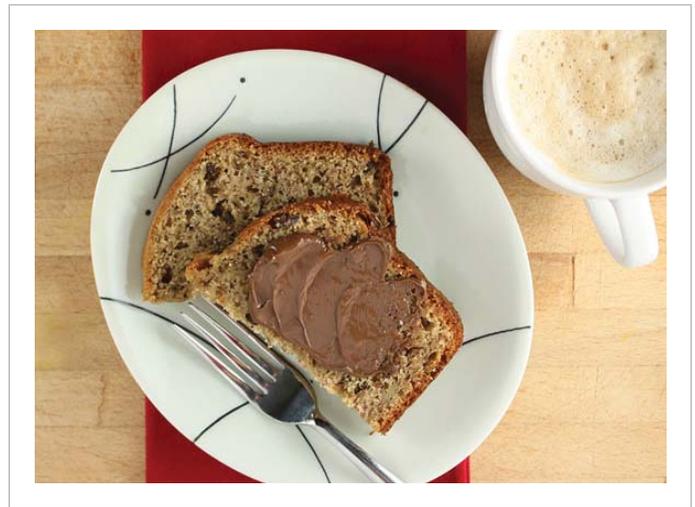
The Perfect Banana Bread

A bread truly worthy of superlatives: tender and moist, airy but substantial, perfect from breakfast to dessert.

Ingredients

Makes one bread or one 9-inch square cake

1 cup [250 ml]	unbleached all-purpose flour
½ cup [125 ml]	whole wheat flour
1 tsp [5 ml]	baking powder
½ tsp [5 ml]	baking soda
¼ tsp [5 ml]	allspice (or ¼ tsp [5 ml] cinnamon)
¾ cup [185 ml]	sugar
2 tbsp [30 ml]	melted butter
1	large egg white
1	large egg, at room temperature
1 cup [250 ml]	banana puree, from about 2 very ripe medium-sized bananas
½ cup [125 ml]	buttermilk or sour cream
½ tsp [2.5 ml]	vanilla extract
1	shot (about 3 tbsp [45 ml]) of strong espresso coffee, cooled (or mix 1 tbsp [15 ml] instant espresso powder with 3 tbsp [45 ml] of hot water)



Suggested additions:

3 tbsp [45 ml]	cocoa nibs OR
3 tbsp [45 ml]	cocoa nibs and 3 tbsp [45 ml] chopped walnuts OR
1/3 cup [80 ml]	chocolate chips OR
3 tbsp [45 ml]	white chocolate chips and 3 tbsp [45 ml] chopped pecans

Method

Butter a rectangular bread pan or a 9-inch (23 cm) square pan (I use nonstick spray instead of butter). Preheat the oven to 350°F [180°C].

Sift together in a bowl the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and allspice (or cinnamon). Mix in the sugar.

In a large bowl, mix together the butter, egg white, egg, banana puree, buttermilk or sour cream, vanilla and espresso.

Make a well in the center of the flour mixture and stir in the wet ingredients with a spatula until almost mixed. Add in your choice of additions and stir until just combined, but don't overstir: stop when any traces of flour disappear.

Scrape the mixture into the prepared pan. Bake the bread for 60 minutes or the square cake for 40 minutes. The center must feel lightly-springy and just done.

Cool on a baking rack and enjoy with a good cup of coffee.

Recipe Credit: Adapted from David Lebovitz

Photo Credit: Marie Asselin

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The Perfect Banana Bread, cont'd

Storage: This cake will keep well for 3-4 days, or can be frozen, wrapped in plastic wrap, for a few months.

Notes:

- Bananas you choose to make this bread must be very ripe: the skin should have black speckles on them and be soft to the touch. If your bananas are not ripe enough yet, let them sit on your countertop for a couple of days. Your bread's flavor will increase tenfold.
- It may seem strange to add a shot of super-strong espresso to the batter, but as David Lebovitz says, coffee and bananas make a great couple. Since coffee is a tropical fruit, as are bananas, the combination makes sense. Don't worry, it won't taste like coffee; the addition will simply impart a deeper flavor to your bread.
- I like to use buttermilk in this recipe but I very rarely have it on hand. Making your own buttermilk is really easy: Measure 1½ tsp [7.5 ml] of white vinegar in a measuring cup. Add enough milk to reach the ½ cup [125 ml] mark. Mix, let rest for 5 minutes and voilà, you have just the right amount of buttermilk you need, no spoiling. (The basic substitution ratio is 1 tbsp [15 ml] white vinegar for 1 cup [250 ml] milk).

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