



Banana Poppy Seed Bread

MAKES ONE 4 BY 8-INCH LOAF



This sweet, moist, and tender quick bread is flavored with dates, vanilla, true cinnamon, and nutmeg. Freshly grind the poppy seeds to release their nutty flavor. Enjoy a slice or two fresh or lightly toasted with a bowl of fruit and a cup of tea for a delightful breakfast or afternoon pick-me-up.

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Blend the vanilla extract, bananas, yogurt, and ½ cup of the date paste in a blender or food processor until smooth.
3. In a bowl, mix the flour, poppy seeds, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Add the wet ingredients and stir briefly just to combine. Taste the batter and correct the level of sweetness (a little more date paste if needed) and spice (another pinch or two of the poppy seeds, cinnamon, or nutmeg if needed).
4. Pour the batter into a glass 4 by 8-inch loaf pan. Bake it on the middle rack of your oven for 45 minutes then begin checking for doneness. Remove the loaf when golden and fragrant and a toothpick inserted into its center comes out clean. Do not undercook the bread, as it may be gummy.
5. Allow the bread to cool completely before slicing; this will allow the bread to finish cooking thoroughly in its center. Serve slightly warmed or toasted.

PREP: 15 minutes

BAKE: 50 to 55 minutes

2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

3 ripe bananas

½ cup Vegan Greek-Style Yogurt (page 54)

1 cup Date Paste (page 42), or to taste

2 cups whole grain flour (I use oat and buckwheat, but any combo in any proportion will work)

2 tablespoons freshly ground poppy seeds, or to taste

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon freshly ground Ceylon (true) cinnamon, or to taste

½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg, or to taste



Vegan Greek-Style Yogurt

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS



Cultured with a broad blend of lactobacilli, soy milk is transformed into a live probiotic yogurt through the process of fermentation, and it is absolutely delicious. It is irresistible mixed with fresh fruits or vegetables, and provides a base for dressings, dips, and sauces. Use Solgar Advanced 40+ acidophilus and Rite Aid Maximum Strength Probiotic for their thick and creamy results. Special equipment: a candy thermometer and heat source like a warming drawer, yogurt maker, Instant Pot, or dehydrator.

PREP: 30 minutes plus 8 hours to culture

1 quart homemade or organic unsweetened soy milk with no additives, like Westsoy or Edensoy.

2 capsules Solgar Advanced 40+ (see left)

2 capsules Rite Aid Maximum Strength Probiotic (see left)

1. In a saucepan, heat the soy milk over medium heat to 108°F on a candy thermometer. Stir in the four capsules until dissolved. Transfer the mixture to clean lidded containers or jars and cover.
2. Set your heat source to 100°F, add the containers, and culture for 8 hours. Over this time, the bacteria will proliferate, thickening and flavoring the yogurt. Retighten the lids and transfer to the refrigerator. The yogurt will keep for several weeks.

VARIATIONS

CRÈME FRAÎCHE AND SOFT CHEESES: Spread a square of muslin over a large strainer or colander and spoon in the yogurt. Tie up the corners of the muslin with kitchen twine to create a ball and hang it over a bowl to drip, thicken, and continue to ferment for the length of time listed below before using or storing in the fridge.

2 hours for crème fraîche

3 hours for Icelandic skyr

4 hours for cream cheese

6 to 8 hours in the fridge for thick plain labneh and colorful süzme (see below)

SÜZME: Shape the soft cheese into bite-size balls or oblongs, and roll in any or all of these traditional toppings: crushed Aleppo pepper; za'atar; roasted, peeled, and chopped pistachios; ground sumac berries; fresh chopped herbs like dill, parsley, or mint; toasted sesame seeds; and toasted pine nuts.



Dried Fruit Paste

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP



Dried fruits, simply reconstituted with water and puréed, make a fabulous alternative to refined sweeteners. Use them in doughs for cookies, sweet breads, tarts, and pies, atop Roasted Plum Crostini (page 215), or even smeared over yogurt cream cheese or Soy Chèvre (page 54 or 66). Mix contrasting flavors, like sweet-sour by adding tamarind pulp, vinegars, or citrus; or sweet-spicy ones by adding chilies.

Dates are the sweetest, with Medjools leading the pack with their butterscotch and vanilla flavor notes, but don't neglect dried figs, plums, apricots, and mangoes, or tart cranberries and sour cherries. Each fruit paste lends flavor and luscious texture to any sweet treat.

PREP: 5 minutes

COOK: 5 minutes

1½ cups dried fruit, pits, if any, removed

1. In a saucepan, cover the dried fruit with water. Bring to simmer over medium heat and cook for 5 minutes. Alternatively, cover with water in a microwave-safe bowl and heat for 2 minutes on high power. Let cool in the soaking liquid.
2. Transfer the rehydrated fruit to a high-speed blender. Add as little or much of the soaking water as needed: less for a dense paste or more for a softer, looser texture. Blend until very smooth. Fruit paste will keep in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks, and in the freezer for 3 months.



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