

Very good moist!

Banana-Nut Bread

One batter, four toppings, unlimited oohs and aahs.

Oh, wow, this bread is amazing” and “it’s better than my recipe” were the phrases of praise that came from the Foods staff when Test Kitchens Professional Pam Lolley tested each version of Cream Cheese-Banana-Nut Bread. The cream cheese in the batter provides a melt-in-your-mouth texture and a slightly tangy flavor, while extra-ripe bananas are the secret to sweetness. Speedy to mix, the batter bakes in loaves or muffin cups. Add any one of the toppings, and you’ll go faint with pleasure after the first divine bite.

CREAM CHEESE-BANANA-NUT BREAD

MAKES 2 LOAVES
PREP: 15 MIN., BAKE: 1 HR., COOL: 40 MIN.

Warm bread is yummy, but to get perfect slices, let bread cool 30 minutes, and cut with a serrated or electric knife.

- ¾ cup butter, softened
- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups mashed bananas (1¼ pounds unpeeled bananas, about 4 medium)
- 1 cup chopped pecans, toasted
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

BEAT butter and cream cheese at medium speed with an electric mixer until creamy. Gradually add sugar, beating

until light and fluffy. Add eggs, 1 at a time, beating just until blended after each addition.

COMBINE flour and next 3 ingredients; gradually add to butter mixture, beating at low speed just until blended. Stir in bananas, pecans, and vanilla. Spoon batter into 2 greased and floured 8- x 4-inch loafpans.

BAKE at 350° for 1 hour or until a long wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean and sides pull away from pan, shielding with aluminum foil last 15 minutes to prevent browning, if necessary. Cool bread in pans on wire racks 10 minutes. Remove from pans, and cool 30 minutes on wire racks before slicing.

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CREAM CHEESE-BANANA-NUT MUFFINS: To bake muffins, spoon batter evenly into 24 paper-lined muffin cups. Bake at 350° for 25 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pans 10 minutes. Remove from pans, and cool completely on wire racks. Makes 24 muffins. Prep: 15 min., Bake: 25 min.

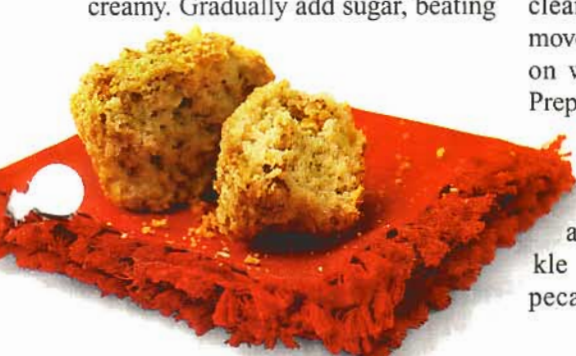
ORANGE-PECAN-TOPPED CREAM CHEESE-BANANA-NUT BREAD:

Prepare bread batter as directed, and spoon into desired pans. Sprinkle 1 cup coarsely chopped, toasted pecans evenly over batter in pans.



BANANA BASICS

The perfect bananas for this bread don't look so perfect. Let them get ripe, almost black, or very speckled. It takes a week to go from green to ready. To hasten ripening, place in a paper bag with a bruised apple. Once ripe, refrigerate or freeze unpeeled bananas in zip-top plastic freezer bags; thaw before mashing. We tried to freeze mashed bananas, but once thawed, they were watery and not suitable to use. A 6-ounce unpeeled banana yields about ⅓ cup mashed banana.



Orange-Pecan-Topped Cream Cheese-Banana-Nut Bread
left: Cinnamon Crisp-Topped Cream Cheese-Banana-Nut Muffin