

## Banana Pudding

Our Young Chefs, 2015  
Makes 12 to 14 servings

*Southern comfort food at its best with a citrus twist! The addition of orange and lime zest is not meant to lend a distinctly citrus flavor, but offer the pudding a subtle accent that compliments the banana flavor, which is distinctly the star of this classic dessert. The pineapple variation turns this Southern treasure into more of a tropical treat!*



### INGREDIENTS

#### PUDDING

2 cups (16 ounces) half and half  
1 cup (8 ounces) whole milk  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  vanilla bean, split lengthwise  
*(optional)*  
Orange zest, 2 to 4-inch length  
removed with a vegetable peeler  
Lime zest, 2-inch length removed with a vegetable peeler

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup (5.25 ounces) granulated sugar  
 $3\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons (0.9 ounces)  
cornstarch (measure generously if  
using the pineapple)  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt  
4 egg yolks, room temperature  
2 eggs, room temperature  
1 can (8 ounces) crushed pineapple,  
drained *(optional - a variation)*

### DIRECTIONS

**Heat and flavor the milk:** In a 3- or 4-quart saucepan, combine the half-and-half, milk, vanilla bean (scrape the vanilla bean seeds out of the pod with the tip of a paring knife), orange and lime zest. Gently heat until the mixture just comes to a boil. Watch carefully so it does not boil over. Take the pan off the heat.

**Prepare the cornstarch/egg base for the pudding:** Meanwhile, in a medium-size mixing bowl, combine the sugar, cornstarch and salt. Stir together with a small whisk to blend thoroughly. Add the yolks and eggs; stir vigorously with the whisk to blend until lemony in color. For a variation, stir in a drained can of crushed pineapple. (If using the crushed pineapple, use the smaller amount of orange zest so it does not overshadow the pineapple flavor.)

**Temper the eggs:** When the milk mixture is heated, slowly pour the hot milk into the egg/cornstarch mixture while constantly stirring the egg mixture with a whisk to slowly heat the eggs. This is called "tempering" the eggs. (This process is easiest to do with two people - one person pouring while the second person stirring while holding the bowl steady *OR* the bowl with the eggs can be secured by nesting it in a circle of a damp cloth dish towel on the counter while pouring with one hand and vigorously stirring with the other hand.)

**Complete cooking the pudding:** Pour this whisked mixture back into the cooking pan. Place over medium heat; cook, stirring constantly with a whisk, scraping the bottom and sides. When you can feel that the pudding is beginning to thicken, immediately lower the heat to low; continue to scrape the bottom and sides while stirring with the whisk. When the pudding begins to bubble, *allow it to bubble for 1 minute*. (This additional 1 minute of cooking is very important so the pudding loses the raw cornstarch flavor.) Remove from the heat. →

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$\frac{1}{2}$  stick ( $\frac{1}{4}$  cup/2 ounces) unsalted butter, cut into 1 tablespoon pieces  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon vanilla extract

**Flavor and finish the pudding:** Cut the **butter** into 1-tablespoon-size pieces. Add the **butter** and **vanilla** to the warm **pudding**; stir to blend until all of the **butter** is melted. Remove the **vanilla bean**<sup>\*</sup>, strips of **orange** and **lime zest**. Discard the **zest strips**.

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12-ounce box vanilla wafers  
7 bananas, sliced crosswise,  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick

**Assemble the banana pudding:** In a 3-quart baking/casserole dish, spread a **small amount** of the warm **pudding** on the bottom. Then assemble the **banana pudding** in the following order:

1. Place a **layer of vanilla wafers** over the **bottom**.
2. Place a **layer of wafers** around the **sides** of the casserole dish.
3. Top the **layer of wafers** with one-third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) of the **banana slices**.
4. Pour about one-third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) of the **remaining custard** over the **banana layer**.

Continue to **layer wafers**, **bananas** and **custard** (steps 1, 3 and 4 above) to make a **total of 3 layers of each**, ending with a **thin layer of custard**.

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#### MERINGUE

4 egg whites  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon cream of tartar  
Pinch salt  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (3.5 ounces) superfine sugar  
 $1\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoons vanilla extract

**Prepare the meringue:** Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a clean, grease-free mixing bowl with clean beaters, beat the **egg whites** until the **egg whites** are foamy. Add the **cream of tartar**; continue beating until the **egg whites** begin to take on volume. Gradually add the **salt** and **superfine sugar**, beating until the **meringue forms stiff peaks**, 4 to 5 minutes. Add the **vanilla extract**; blend briefly.

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**Top the pudding with meringue:** Spoon the **meringue** over the surface of the **custard**; decoratively spread with the back of a spoon **OR** a metal icing spatula. Seal the **meringue** well at the edge of the casserole.

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**Bake and serve:** Bake 12 to 15 minutes at 350°F or until the **meringue** is lightly browned. Cool to room temperature. Refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving so the **wafers** can soften and the flavors can blend.

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<sup>\*</sup>After using the **vanilla bean** in this recipe, lightly rinse it, dry it at room temperature overnight, then place it in a container of **sugar** to impart the **vanilla flavor** to the **sugar**. This **vanilla sugar** can be used to flavorfully sweeten fresh fruits, cereal, beverages, baked goods, etc.

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