

BANANA CREAM PIE

On our first date, Deeann and I went to Emeril's restaurant in Orlando. We had a great meal, but I think Deeann's favorite part was the dessert: Banana Cream Pie! It remains to this day her favorite dessert, so it was critical for me to get this right! We tried Emeril's recipe, Betty Crocker's, America's Test Kitchen, and several internet recipes...all of them had some wonderful aspects, but none had it all. I tried to take the best parts of each recipe and combine them into one, and I think I have done exactly that. (That's what Deeann says anyway, and that's what's important!) This pie takes a fair amount of time and effort, but it's worth it. Assuming you are making this for company or a special occasion, please make it the day before to help reduce your stress.

INGREDIENTS:

1 ¼ Cups Sugar

½ Cup +1 Tablespoon Corn Starch

¼ teaspoon Salt

10 Egg Yolks

2 Cups Half and Half

2 Cups Whole Milk

1 Cup Evaporated Milk

1 Vanilla Bean *** (These are pretty pricey. You can use 2 teaspoons of vanilla extract if you like but it won't taste as rich.)

4 Tablespoons Butter

1 Tablespoon Brandy (optional, but it has a nice aromatic effect)

5-6 Bananas (I prefer them just a tad green at the stem, but use what you like)

1 ½ Recipes of my Graham Cracker Crust

Cool Whip (or whipped cream with some vanilla in it, but this is rich enough already!)

Shaved Chocolate (optional)

Chocolate Syrup (optional)

Caramel Syrup (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

For the filling: Whisk the sugar, cornstarch, and salt together in a large sauce pan. Whisk in the egg yolks, then immediately but gradually, whisk in the 3 milks. Cut the vanilla bean lengthwise, then using a paring knife, scrape the very small seeds from the pods, then add the seeds and pods to the mixture, whisking well. Turn burner to medium heat and bring the mixture to a simmer, whisking frequently. Once it starts to thicken and gently boil, whisk

continuously until the mixture is thick and smooth. Remove from heat, fish out the vanilla pods, then whisk in the butter and brandy (if desired...the brandy, not the butter).

Pour the filling into a 9 X 11 baking pan. Place a sheet of plastic wrap flush on the surface to prevent a skin from forming, and allow to cool at room temperature until just warm, about 30 minutes or so.

As the filling is cooling, enjoy licking the spatula and bowl, but now it's time to make the graham cracker crust (remember to make it half again as big) and use a deep dish pie pan, cooking as directed.

As the crust and filling are cooling, peel and slice the bananas. You can slice thinly, thickly, or in chunks depending on what you like. That's what's great about being the cook!

Once the crust and filling are reasonably cool (won't cause you discomfort to handle with your bare hands) pour/scrape 1/3 of the filling into the pie crust, spread it out, then evenly layer half of the bananas on top. Add another 1/3 of the filling, add the remaining bananas, and top with the remaining filling. Once again, cover the pie flush with a piece of plastic wrap. Refrigerate until completely chilled, at least 4 hours.

FINISHING TOUCHES:

For us, topping the pie with Cool Whip works great. If you want to be fancy however, here are some tips:

If you want real whipped cream, combine 1 Cup Heavy Whipping Cream (chilled), 1 Tablespoon Sugar, and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Just before serving, whisk ingredients until soft peaks form, then spread attractively over the pie.

Whichever topping you choose, if you want to pull out all of the stops, drizzle lightly with chocolate and/or caramel toppings, then, using a sharp knife and high quality chocolate bar, scrape off chocolate shavings and place on top to make a truly remarkable and beautiful dessert.