



BANANA BREAD is one of the most common baked goods made at home, and most of them taste just that — common. We wanted a revved-up recipe that would produce flavorful results without additional effort. So we paired one of banana's most complementary spices — cardamom — with nutty browned butter. Blooming the cardamom in hot butter draws out the spice's aromas, producing a more complex flavor in the finished bread. We found we needed two leaveners. Baking powder alone gave the bread lift but turned out a pale loaf. Baking soda resulted in a well-browned top but a dense crumb. Combining the two was perfect. Measuring the bananas in a 1-cup dry measuring cup was important; the difference in moisture between 4 small and 4 large bananas could throw off the balance of the ingredients. While we preferred the deeper flavor of dark brown sugar here, light brown works just as well. Sprinkling granulated sugar over the top of the loaf just before baking created a crisp, brown crust that we loved.

Brown Butter-Cardamom Banana Bread

Start to finish: 1 hour 15 minutes (25 active)

Makes one 9-inch loaf

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups (10 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) salted butter
- 1¼ teaspoons ground cardamom
- 2 cups mashed banana (about 4 very ripe bananas)
- ¾ cup packed (5¼ ounces) dark brown sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon white sugar (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

Heat the oven to 350°F with a rack in the upper-middle position. Mist a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan with cooking spray. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Once melted, continue to cook, swirling the pan often, until the butter is fragrant and deep brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and immediately whisk in the cardamom. Carefully add the bananas (the butter will sizzle and bubble up) and whisk until combined. Add the brown sugar, eggs and vanilla, then whisk until smooth. Add the banana mixture to the flour mixture and, using a silicone spatula, fold until just combined and no dry flour remains.

Transfer the batter to the prepared pan and sprinkle evenly with the white sugar, if using. Bake until the loaf is well browned, the top is cracked and a toothpick inserted at the center of the loaf comes out clean, 50 to 55 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through. Cool the bread in the pan on a wire rack for 15 minutes, then turn out the loaf and cool completely before serving. Cooled bread can be wrapped tightly and stored at room temperature for up to 4 days or refrigerated for up to 1 week.

DON'T measure the bananas by number, as differences in sizes can throw off the balance of ingredients. Measure them using a dry measuring cup instead.