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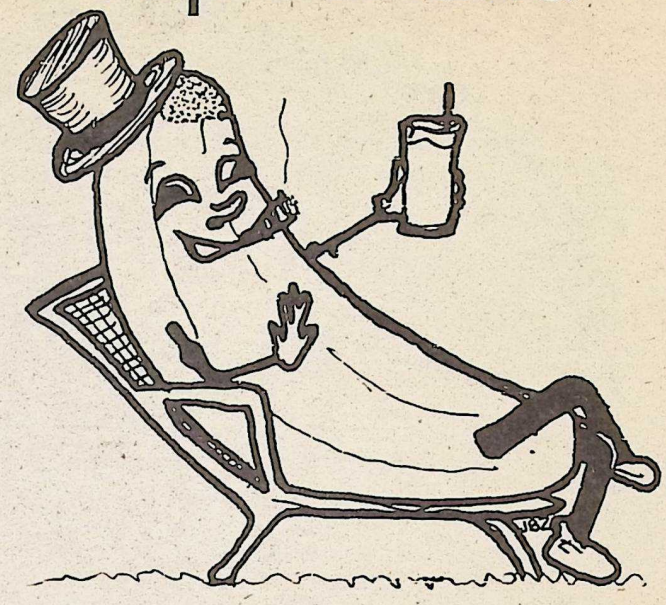
Top Banana

by Lydia Lovell



"If they ever discontinue the banana," Aunt Olivia often said, "life wouldn't be worth living." I doubt there's much danger because bananas are a popular fruit. Aunt Olivia's banana bread and banana cake and banana pudding and banana fruit compote all gave testimony to her sincerity, however. Nor was she unique; bananas have long been a mainstay among peoples of tropical lands and are on our own list of staples purchased week after week, all the year through.

In one of Aunt Olivia's old cook books a banana lover writes, "What Keats could have done with the lovely names of our tropical fruits! Papaya and guava, banana and mango, sapodilla and star apple, persimmon and pomogranate... the list goes on. In the tropics, heavy desserts are not, as the Spanish say, 'simpatico.' Light creams, delicate cakes, and cool sherbets predominate. Tartness of lime juice lends accent; snowy coconut drifts across the bright flesh of fruits, and pineapple and banana perfume and sweeten." Could Keats have done better? Perhaps.

In any case, we shall begin with Aunt Olivia's **Banana Cake** and see how many banana recipes we have space for.

1/2 C. butter or margarine
1 1/2 C. sugar
2 eggs, separated
1 t. baking soda
1/4 C., plus 1T., buttermilk
2 C. all-purpose flour
3 large ripe bananas, mashed
1 C. chopped pecans

With shortening at room temperature, cream well, add sugar gradually, beating thoroughly. Add one egg yolk at a time, continuing to beat. Dissolve baking soda in buttermilk, and alternately with flour, add to creamed mixture. Mash bananas and chop nuts. Stir into batter. Beat egg whites until stiff and fold into batter.

Pour into two greased and floured 8" round cake pans; bake at 350° for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool cakes in pans for 10 minutes. Remove and let cool completely. Fill and frost with **Caramel Frosting.**

1 1/4 C. sugar
3/4 C. firmly packed brown sugar
1 C. evaporated milk
1/2 C. butter or margarine

Combine all ingredients in heavy saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until frosting forms a soft ball in cold water (240° on candy thermometer). Remove from heat and beat until mixture thickens to spreading consistency. Add a little more milk if necessary. Spread immediately between layers and over top and sides of cooled cake.

Lovers of tropical fruits will appreciate **Guava Bananas.**

6 under-ripe small bananas
3/4 C. guava jelly
1/8 c. butter
1 half-pint rich cream
1 pkg. shredded coconut

Peel bananas and place in a buttered Pyrex pie pan or baking dish. Dot with jelly and butter; bake, uncovered, in a 325° oven for 20 minutes, basting three or four times with melting jelly. Serve hot with a pitcher of coconut cream made by soaking the coconut in the cream for three hours in the refrigerator. Serves 6.

Aunt Olivia's Banana Pudding, excellent though it was, couldn't hold a candle to **Key West Banana Pudding.**

12 bananas, mashed
1 stick margarine or butter
2 eggs, beaten
1/2 C. flour
2 t. baking powder
Sugar and spices to taste

To mashed bananas, add beaten eggs, melted butter, and a few tablespoons of sugar, a couple of shakes of cinnamon and of nutmeg. Taste to determine if more flavoring is desired. Sift flour with baking powder and stir into banana mixture. Pour into Pyrex baking dish and bake at 400° until mixture begins to bubble (15 to 20 minutes). Turn oven temperature to 300° and bake until a silver knife blade comes out clean (another hour or so). Cool before cutting. Serve plain or top with whipped cream or **Lemon Sauce.**

2 C. water, boiling
1/2 C. sugar
1 egg, slightly beaten
1 T. flour
Grated rind and juice of one lemon

Mix sugar and flour and pour boiling water over slowly, stirring constantly. Cook until thickened, add lemon rind and juice, then beaten egg. Serve hot.

Continuing, with only a deep breath between, we go right on to **Banana Cream Pie.**

2 C. milk, heated to boiling
3 eggs, separated
3 T. cornstarch
1 t. vanilla extract
2 T. sugar
pinch of salt
2 t. cold water
3 ripe bananas, sliced thin
9" pie tin lined with baked pie shell or graham cracker crust

Beat egg yolks until lemon colored; add sugar, cornstarch, salt, and water, and mix well. Boil milk in top of double boiler. Stirring constantly, add egg mixture. Return to heat over boiling water; cook until thickened, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat, add vanilla, cool. Cut bananas in thin slices and cover bottom of pie shell. When creamed mixture is cool, spread over bananas. Beat whites of eggs until stiff, add 2 T. granulated sugar and 1/2 t. cream of tartar. Spread over cream. Brown quickly in a 375° oven. Now THAT is a Banana Cream Pie!

Banana dishes are not limited to desserts. People living in tropical countries enjoy **Banana Fritters** as much as we like corn fritters.

1 1/2 C. flour
2 heaping t. baking powder
1/4 t. salt
1 C. milk
1 egg, beaten
4 peeled, sliced bananas

Sift dry ingredients together. Beat egg, add milk, add to flour gradually. Stir in bananas last. Fry 1/4 cup of batter to a fritter on greased griddle, flipping as you would a pancake. Serve with powdered sugar or, if you have real maple syrup, you're in for a treat.

Returning to dessert dishes, one of Uncle Henry's favorites was **Banana Chiffon Pie.**

1 env. unflavored gelatin
1/4 C. cold water
3 eggs, separated
1 C. mashed fully ripe bananas
1 T. fresh lemon juice
1/4 t. grated lemon rind
1/3 C. sugar
1/4 t. salt
1/2 C. whipping cream
1/2 pkg. grated coconut

Soften gelatin in cold water. In top of double boiler combine slightly beaten egg yolks, mashed bananas, lemon juice and rind, sugar, and salt. Cook over boiling water, stirring constantly, until slightly thickened. Remove from heat. Stir softened gelatin into banana mixture until dissolved. Chill until mixture is slightly thickened. Beat egg whites stiff, but not dry. Beat cream stiff. Fold egg whites, cream, and shredded coconut into banana mixture and pile into baked 9" shell. Chill until firm. To gild this lily, top with whipped cream, shavings of bitter chocolate and banana slices.

Visitors in New Orleans, Lousiana, go to Brennan's for its traditional (can you imagine?) breakfast dessert. While I could not face it until after lunch, nor do I anticipate breakfast at Brennan's, **Bananas Foster** is an elegant dish.

4 T. butter
1/4 C. packed dark brown sugar
1/2 t. cinnamon
2 T. banana liqueur or cordial
4 medium-sized firm bananas, quartered
1/4 C. rum
4 scoops vanilla ice cream

Yield: 4 servings

In a shallow skillet, melt butter, add sugar, cinnamon, and banana cordial. Stir and bring to a boil. Simmer two minutes. Cut peeled bananas in half, lenghwise, and again, crosswise. Place banana quarters in sauce and cook, stirring gently, about 5 minutes until bananas are soft. Add rum and allow to heat slightly. Flame sauce with lighted match and allow to burn out. Serve four banana pieces over a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Spoon hot sauce on top.

Could you be tempted to serve bananas as a vegetable? If so, you will have no regrets following **Yam Stuffed Bananas.**

6 large green-tipped bananas
2 1/2 C. cooked yams, mashed
1 t. salt and 1 T. brown sugar
1 can crushed pineapple- drain
1/2 C. chopped salted peanuts
6 slices crisp-cooked bacon, crumbled

Wash bananas and split skins lengthwise on one side only. Do not cut through ends or opposite side of peel. Reserving shells, remove banana pulp and mash. Combine bananas with all other ingredients and mix well. Refill shells with mixture and bake in shallow pan at 350° for 15 minutes. Serve in shells to six hungry people.

We will have more banana recipes another day...