

The Real Deal Banana Pudding

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There's nothing wrong with shortcuts; they can be helpful *and* tasty. But after so many years of making banana pudding my mother's way (boxed instant pudding, Nabisco vanilla wafers), I was curious about what it would taste like made from scratch. A "cook the pudding, bake the vanilla wafers" kind of situation. As I suspected, it's delish. Your family will not believe their luck when you whip out this from-scratch banana pudding. You'll be the talk of the barbecue, the toast of the cookout! From scratch isn't hard, but it *is* impressive. Get ready to pat yourself on the back and reward your tastebuds for their patience. But don't forget to read the notes first — they'll help you make a banana pudding that gets shared on IG.

Ingredients:

Vanilla Pudding

3 cups whole milk, divided ($\frac{1}{4}$, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$)
4 tbsp. (32g) cornstarch
 $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. salt
 $\frac{3}{4}$ (148g) cup sugar
3 egg yolks
1 tbsp. butter
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Vanilla Wafers

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, slightly softened
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (133 grams) granulated sugar
1 large egg
4 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups (190 grams) all-purpose flour
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. baking powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt
1 tbsp. milk

To Assemble

1 8 oz. package cream cheese, room temperature
150 grams (approx. half a can) sweetened condensed milk
1 carton whipping cream, whipped
Homemade vanilla pudding

Homemade vanilla wafers
6-7 ripe (but not overly ripe) bananas

Directions:

Vanilla Pudding

1. Whisk together $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk and the cornstarch in a small bowl. Set aside.
2. Whisk the egg yolks in a small bowl and set aside.
3. Whisk together remaining milk, salt, and sugar. Heat over medium heat until mixture is steamy but not boiling. *Don't let it get to a boil.*
4. When the milk mixture is steaming, take $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the mixture and slowly stream it into the egg yolks, whisking constantly. Slowly add this egg yolk mixture back into the pan with the milk. Now add your cornstarch mixture.
5. Continue to cook on medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture simmers slightly and is thickened.
6. Remove mixture from the heat and whisk in the butter and vanilla.
7. Pour into a medium-sized bowl, covering the top of the pudding with plastic wrap so a skin doesn't form. Place in the refrigerator until thoroughly chilled.

Vanilla Wafers

1. Preheat oven to 350F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a medium bowl, combine flour, baking powder, and salt. Whisk together.
3. Combine butter and sugar in a mixing bowl and cream together using an electric mixer.
4. Add the egg and vanilla extract and mix on low speed until fully incorporated.
5. Add half the dry ingredients to the creamed butter mixture and mix on low speed until incorporated.
6. Add milk and mix on low.
7. Add the remaining dry ingredients and mix until well incorporated.
8. Using a 2-tsp. cookie scoop, scoop cookies onto a prepared baking sheet, spacing them 2" apart.
9. Lightly press them flat with damp fingertips.
10. Bake in preheated oven for 12-14 minutes until the cookies are light brown around the edges. You want the cookies more crispy than not. Like the wafers out of the box!
11. Cool the cookies on the pan for 5-10 minutes, then remove to a cooling rack.

To assemble

1. In a large bowl, using an electric mixer, cream the cream cheese until soft and fluffy.
2. Add the sweetened condensed milk and mix thoroughly.
3. Gently fold in the vanilla pudding and half of the whipped topping.
4. In an 8x11 casserole dish, crumble enough vanilla wafers to cover the bottom.
5. Slice bananas and place enough to cover the crushed vanilla wafers.
6. Gently spoon half of the vanilla pudding mixture over the bananas.
7. Repeat these layers one more time.

8. Cover the top pudding layer with the rest of the whipped cream.
9. Chill for at least 3 hours or overnight before serving. Keep refrigerated.

Notes:

- The pudding requires constant stirring. Turn on a good podcast or your favorite Pandora station and enjoy the mindless activity. Be patient with your pudding!
- If your pudding is lumpy, strain it. Two things are key to anti-lumpy pudding: tempering your eggs and stirring. Stir, stir, stir.
- I have been using A-2 whole milk which is creamier than regular whole milk. It seems to thicken faster.
- I have also been using super-fine baker's sugar in everything. I love it.
- Homemade vanilla wafers are not as "perfect" as the ones from the box. Don't get upset if they aren't perfect round disks. They're still delicious.
- The number of cookies you get will depend on the size of your cookie scoop. I suggest smaller rather than larger.
- If your pudding is thick enough, you might be able to add the whole can of sweetened condensed milk if you'd like to. I didn't want it quite that sweet, and I was carefully judging the thickness of the pudding.
- You want edible bananas but not overly ripe. They shouldn't turn to mush when you slice them.
- If you would rather use a glass bowl to assemble it in, do that! Put your banana pudding in whatever container works for you; just remember to judge your layers correctly—you may end up with more. My grandfather used to pull the crisper out of the refrigerator and layer his banana pudding in that! Quite clever.