

Jugito's Sourdough Banana-Date-Nut Bread

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I would like to say that this recipe has been in my family for generation, for it makes unbelievably light, crunchy, delicious bread. It had never seen the light of day till I decided to make it instead of tossing out some overripe bananas.

After several months of messing with sourdough starter and various kinds of breads, I felt that I had the technique of making a good loaf with a pleasing taste and texture. I instituted variations in the process that have to do with starter batter and yeast. I often

do not want to wait all day or overnight to let sourdough loaves rise, but at the same time, I enjoyed the sumptuous tartness of good sourdough bread. So, I decided to add double or triple the amount of sourdough starter most recipes call for. I reasoned that since the starter was already sour, it would impart sufficient tartness, and then I could add a little yeast for faster rising.

But since Banana nut bread is not supposed to be tart (is it?) like sourdough bread is, I thought I would only put a cup of starter into the dough, and balance it with a teaspoon of yeast for quicker rising. When you use yeast, recipes usually suggest you mix it with warm water and sugar or



honey to make it foam up before adding it to the dough. I decided that it was better to give the dough a longer rise time to assist a little of the sourdough flavor by not foaming it before adding it.

The result was a magnificent-tasting Banana-Date-Nut bread, for which I give you the following recipe. My wife Maria, usually conscious of her calories, devoured half a loaf by herself. The above picture shows only one slice of the small loaf left. The rounded loaf was baked in a metal mixing bowl.



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Recipe for Sourdough Banana-Date-Nut Bread

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Ingredients:

- 2 cups King Arthur Special unbleached bread flour (<http://www.kingarthurfLOUR.com/>)
- 2 cups King Arthur whole-wheat flour
- 1 rounded teaspoon small grain sea salt
- 1 teaspoon Redstar dry baker's yeast granules (<http://www.redstaryeast.com/>)
- 6 tablespoons cold butter
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup sourdough starter batter (see recipe following this one)
- 3 eggs
- 4 ripe bananas
- ¼ cup honey
- ½ to ¾ cup walnuts
- ½ to ¾ cup pecans
- 6 fat Medjool Dates (<http://dejafarms.com/>)
- ¼ cup milk
- shallow baking pan of water

Equipment:

- Cuisinart food processor or heavy duty electric mixer with dough hook
- Oven
- 3 medium or two large Bread loaf pans
- 1 quart measuring cup pitcher
- 2-cup bowl

Preparation Time:

- Making dough – 20 minutes
- Rising of dough – 4 to 6 hours
- Baking time - 25 to 45 minutes

Directions:

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- Lightly oil the bread pans on sides and bottom.
- Lightly oil a countertop, smooth stove top, or other work surface for the dough
- Remove pits from dates and quarter them; put dates and nuts into food processor and chop for a few seconds. Do not over-process – leave them coarse enough to give the bread crunchiness and texture, no larger than the size of pinto beans or a little larger.
Pour
- Put bananas into food processor and blend. Gradually add eggs, sourdough starter, honey, then yeast granules and blend till homogenized. Pour into 1-quart pitcher, and set aside. It should contain between 2 and 2 ½ cups of goo.
- Clean and dry the food processor container
- Put flour, salt, yeast granules into food processor and blend thoroughly for 10 seconds.
- While machine is running, cut butter into small chunks, drop into feed tube one at a time, and run machine till thoroughly mixed in, 30 seconds.
- While machine is running, gradually add the contents of the pitcher through the feed tube as fast as the flour can absorb it. Be careful NOT to pour it onto the bare bottom of the food processor container or you will gum up the blade.
- Process the dough till it converts into a relatively smooth, sticky mass that tends to pull away from the sides of the container, and then for another minute. If the machine bogs down, oil your hands, remove half the dough, and process each half separately. If it is too wet
- If you are using an electric mixer, dump in the chopped date/nut mix and continue processing till they are thoroughly mixed into the dough. Otherwise, turn out the dough onto the oiled surface and knead the chopped date/nut mix into the dough till it is evenly distributed.
- Form the dough into elongated lumps that, when flattened into the pan, are between a third and a half the inside height of the pan, then cover each loaf loosely with a sheet of oiled plastic wrap.
- Set the bread pans in a warm place to rise, but not in direct sunlight. A good place is the oven, with the oven light on. The heat from the light will provide abundant warmth. The dough will rise to more than double the original size, and protrude an inch or more above the top of the pan when it is ready, typically in 4 to 6 hours, depending on



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temperature and humidity. If you let it rise too long, it will tend to collapse. If you don't let it rise enough, it will be too heavy and dense.

- Remove the risen loaves from the oven and preheat the oven to 450 degrees.
- Meanwhile, set the shallow pan of water on the stove and bring it to a boil, then shove it onto the bottom rack of the oven just above the heating element. The water will create steam which will give the bread a hearty crust.
- When the oven is up to temperature, put the pans of loaves on the center rack. After 10 minutes, open the door, brush the tops of the loaves with milk, shut the door, and lower the temperature to 375 degrees. If you leave the temperature too high for too long, you will burn the loaves. If you are using dark pans, they will absorb heat better than light pans, and brown the bread faster. If your oven is hotter in one area (like the back) than another, rearrange the loaf pans after 20 minutes of baking.
- After 30 to 45 minutes, depending on altitude and climate, the bread will be nicely browned and done. Remove them from the oven. Let them cool for 10 to 15 minutes and then remove them from the pans. If they are a little sticky, run a sharp knife gently down inside and along each vertical edge of the pan to loosen them up, taking care not to tear the bread. Hold the pan upside down. If the bread does not drop out, shake the pan downward to force the bread out. Set the loaves on wire racks to cool fully.
- If you just cannot stand the wait, use a serrated-edged bread knife to cut a warm slice for everyone in the house, and spread on a little pure butter for a delicious treat.
- After the loaves are completely cool, put them in plastic bags to keep them from getting too dry. If you are not going to eat or give them away right away, put them in the refrigerator to keep them fresh. It is okay to freeze them, but if you do, you should wrap the bagged loaves in a brown paper shopping sack to protect them from freezer burn.

Recipe for Sourdough Starter

- 2 cups+ unbleached white bread flour
- 2 cups+ water
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1-quart plastic or glass container with loose-fitting lid, or
- 1 square of cheese cloth, folded into 6-inch square



Stir together ingredients in container, cover with cloth or loose-fitting lid, and set in warm place out of drafts or direct sunlight for one week. Batter should become bubbly, indicating natural yeast and bacteria have started processing the flour and honey into carbon dioxide gas, alcohol, and tart flavor.

Each day after the first week, stir the batter, remove ½ cup or more, add a like amount of flour and water in equal proportions and stir it well. In 10 to 14 days, the batter will be well-established sourdough starter.

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You can use whatever you remove for baking pancakes and breads. The purpose of sourdough starter is to make the bread rise, and to give the bread a tart taste. It does not work as fast as baker's yeast. Bread dough takes 8 to 10 hours to rise properly when leavened with sourdough starter, and only two hours when leavened with baker's yeast. The longer it is left to rise, the more sour or tart will be the taste of the bread.

If you do not like the result of your own sourdough starter, you can purchase a sourdough culture from a variety of sources. It takes only a teaspoon of the culture mixed in with the above flour and water mix to produce the starter batter.

You may store the batter in the refrigerator, and take it out for a day once a week to let it warm up, feed it more flour and water, and return it to the refrigerator. Usually, you may freeze it for 6 months or more, but freezing will kill some batters.

You may kick-start a batter's tartness by adding a tablespoon of Bragg's apple cider vinegar. You may vary it by adding any good source of starch, such as raw or cooked potatoes, or using potato water or whey (the fluid in clabbered milk) for the liquid.

If you leave the batter too long without stirring it, the alcohol it produces will collect as a tan liquid on top of the starter batter. This is called "hootch", and is reported to have been a poor man's source of alcoholic beverage. "Hootchie-Kootchie" is probably a derivative term that refers to the inebriated and playful attitudes of cooks who consume too much hootch. Hootch is harmless to the batter. Just stir it in. Unless the starter batter is refrigerated, you should stir it at least once a day to aerate it, and feed it at least once every two days.

Some people question whether the bacteria in the starter batter causes a problem. Yeast and bacteria are natural enemies. Yeast is a fungus. Most medicinal antibiotics are synthesized from fungi. As the yeast in the batter grows, it kills the bacteria. That is why you can puree a raw potato and feed it to the batter as a source of liquid and starch without it rotting.

You should, nevertheless, clean your starter batter container once a week. It does not matter what kind of container it is in, but it should not be metal of any kind because the acids from the bacteria will leech metal into the batter, and that is not good. A crock or glass jar is preferable, but plastic works fine. Do not leave the container completely open to the air at the top. Cover it



with a folded piece of cheese cloth to let it breathe and to keep out excessive dust and bugs if any are around.

If your starter is working okay, you should share it with other baker friends. Spread some batter thinly on a piece of plastic wrap, and lay it out in the air to dry. Once it has dried, crunch it by hand into a powder, put it in a plastic bag, and give it away. You can send it by mail, and you can freeze the remainder of the powder for later use. It should last 6 months to a year in the freezer.

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