

Banana Bread!

(Sarah Trautman, Angela Harrington, and Elissa Walter, Spring 2011)

Origins and History:

Wild bananas, which were similar in phenotype to present-day plantains, originated in Malaysia in 2000 BC. The edible, yellow, sweet banana we have today is a hybrid of the wild varieties *Musa acuminata* and *Musa balbisiana*. These hybrid plants are parthenocarpic, which means they are unable to produce viable seeds; therefore, banana propagation must occur by transplanting an offshoot of the plant called a “corm” or “sucker.” Due to the resulting lack of genetic diversity, there are fears that the present day banana plant could be eradicated by disease.

Plant Parts:

The banana “tree” is the world’s largest perennial herb. Leaves form a trunk-like structure known as a pseudostem. A flowering stalk, the inflorescence, grows from the center of the pseudostem. The banana tree fruit matures 60-90 days after flowers appear, but up to one year after the first appearance of the inflorescence. Bananas are the ovaries of the female flower. The banana’s peel protects its edible inner portion (the portion of the banana used in the banana bread recipe), which can be divided into three lengthwise sections called carpels. In between these carpels, there are phloem bundles, which are strings that run lengthwise along the banana.

Nutritional Highlights:

Bananas are about 200 calories and consist of 74% water, 23% carbohydrate, 1% protein, and 0.5% fat. Bananas contain potassium, vitamin B6, vitamin C, fiber, magnesium, Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids. Potassium helps build muscles in the body and plays an important role in muscle contractions. Bananas also contain fructooligosaccharides, which is a nutrient for the microbiota that inhabit our distal gut. This nutrient helps the microbiota proliferate and protect us from infection. The American Heart Association has designated bananas as a heart healthy food. Recently, the US Food and Drug Administration has recognized the banana’s ability to reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke.

Fun Facts:

- The banana is technically a berry.
- Bananas are the world’s best selling fruit.
- The Cavendish is America’s most popular variety of banana.
- Rubbing the inside of a banana peel on a mosquito bite is said to reduce the itching and swelling symptoms caused by the mosquito bite.
- A stem of (approximately 150) bananas weighs 85-100 pounds.

Banana Bread Recipe:

⇒ Blend:

- ◆ 6 T butter or margarine, softened/room temp. ◆ 2/3 cup sugar. ◆ ¾ t. zest of lemon (optional, but good).

⇒ Then add:

- ◆ 2 beaten eggs. ◆ 1 – 1/4 cups mashed banana (this is about 2 bananas)

⇒ Add in 3 parts, beating after each part, but not too much or it will be tough:

- ◆ 1 ¾ c. flour. ◆ 2 ¼ t. baking powder. ◆ ½ t. salt

⇒ Add chopped nuts or dates if desired.

⇒ Bake in a buttered loaf pan at 350° for about an hour.