

What makes something a comfort food? It needs to be something that triggers good memories in your taste buds, and doesn't take you to strange places flavour-wise. I think bread pudding is one of the most wonderful desserts ever devised. It's such a simple dish, the basic version using day old breads, sugar, milk and eggs. We can dress it up, like this recipe, as a dessert, or you can make it savoury for breakfast or brunch. It can easily be made one day, and cooked the next. It's actually better for it. Whether stuffed with raisins & currants or with pears & ginger, I'm pretty sure that it is one of the best comfort foods around. Although, I always remember picking out the raisins when I was young.

Pear & Ginger Bread Pudding with Bourbon Sauce

Serves 8 – 10

Ingredients

1 loaf French bread – crusts removed, cut into 1" cubes (option: Brioche)
4 peeled, cored, and thinly sliced pears
¼ c chopped, crystallized ginger (about ¼" dice)
1½ c brown sugar
2½ c milk
6 T butter
1½ t ground cinnamon
1 t ginger
1 t vanilla extract
3 eggs, beaten

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F

Butter 10 Ramekins (6 oz), a large loaf pan (about 11" x 5") or a 2-quart deep baking dish.

In a large bowl, combine bread, pear pieces and ginger.

In a small bowl, whisk together cinnamon, ginger, vanilla and eggs.

Pour over bread mixture and toss, until all is well coated.

In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine brown sugar, milk, and butter.

Cook and stir until butter is just melted.

Pour over bread mixture in bowl; again, toss well until all is well coated.

Divide equally between the ramekins, or put all of the mixture into the loaf pan or baking dish. Smooth the tops.

Set ramekins in two 9 x 13 pans, or the loaf or baking dish into a roasting pan (check how things fit before you start).

Pour in enough boiling water to come ½ way up sides of whatever dish you're using.

Place in the center of the oven and bake for 50 minutes for ramekins or 1½ hours for the loaf or baking dish, or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean.

Inverting the pudding works well for the ramekin and loaf styles, just run a knife around the sides to be sure it is loose. This makes it easy to slice the loaf into appealing pieces. Don't rush the knife; you need to gently cut through it. Use a bread knife. If you used the deep baking dish, simply scoop out the pudding to serve.

Bourbon Sauce

1 c sugar

6 T butter, melted

½ c buttermilk (or use ½ c milk with a teaspoon of lemon juice mixed in)

2 T Bourbon (I use Jack Daniels even though they say theirs isn't actually Bourbon)

½ t baking soda

1 T white corn syrup

1 t vanilla

In a saucepan large enough to accommodate the mixture while boiling (the cold mixture should only come about 1/3 of the way up the sides), mix all ingredients.

Over medium high heat, bring to a boil for 1 full minute. Stir if necessary to control boiling.

Let cool, while whisking occasionally.

There will be a bit of foam that sits upon the liquid. This can easily be whisked in if the sauce is warm enough. If not, reheat using a microwave 'til just warm enough. You don't want the sauce so hot that it burns mouths.

Serve warm on top of the pudding.