



Use your overripe bananas for cake

Four bananas, well past their prime, sat in our fruit bowl yesterday. Four. I never buy bananas with the intention of letting them turn shades of brown (Does anyone? Well, maybe.) but sometimes that happens.

And sometimes that happens a few times in a few weeks, as it has recently. I always feel a little guilty when we buy bananas but don't get around to eating them all. Each brown spot that appears feels like a little nudge of failure — like I didn't plan well enough, or didn't pack lunches well enough.



SARAH WALKER CARON

Chocolate Covered Banana Cake

Serves 8

½ cup butter, melted
1 cup sugar
4 overripe bananas, peeled and mashed
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp kosher salt
1½ cup all-purpose flour
Chocolate Glaze:
1 cup milk chocolate chips
2 tbsp milk

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Grease and flour a 9-inch round baking pan.

In a large mixing bowl, stir together the melted butter, sugar and bananas. Add the vanilla extract, baking powder and salt and stir well to combine. Add the flour and stir until incorporated. Pour into the baking pan, tapping gently to even out.

Bake for 40-50 minutes, until a cake tester inserted in the middle comes out clean. Let cool for 10 minutes in the pan, before loosening the edges and turning out onto a cooling rack. Let cool.

When the cake is cooled, make the glaze. Add the chocolate chips and milk to a small saucepan set over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring, until the chocolate is melted and incorporated with the milk. Remove from heat and let cool 10 minutes.

Spoon the glaze onto the cake, and use an offset spatula or the back of a spoon to gently spread out over the top.

Dust with sprinkles, if desired. Enjoy.

But if there's a silver lining, it's that those brown bananas mean banana baked goods and other treats. My whole family likes that, and when I can put those bananas to good use there's nothing to feel guilty about.
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ASHLEY L. CONTI | BDN

Adrian Sulea (top) cuts pieces of dough in sections to form loaves and removes loaves (above) from the oven at his bakery, Universal Bread Bakers, in Waterville on Friday. "It's just as much of an art as a science," he said. "You have bad days and good days."

'Eat good bread'

Old World baker brings taste of Europe to Waterville

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

With time, heat, care and a little love, baker Adrian Sulea turns the simplest of ingredients into something transcendent: crusty, golden loaves of bread that would look right at home on the cobbled streets of Europe.

But the baker is glad that his loaves are ending up on the tables of regular Mainers.

"If I have to choose a goal, it is to get as many people to have the best quality bread there is," Sulea, the owner of Universal Bread Bakers in downtown Waterville, said recently. "I think that's the most fulfilling goal. If you eat bread — eat good bread."

The love of good bread is something intrinsic that the 44-year-old Sulea has carried with him from Transylvania, the mountainous region of Romania where he grew up. There, he helped his family mill the grain for the breads they baked in huge, wood-fired ovens, as many as a dozen loaves at a time.

"Bread is huge in Europe. You have bread with pretty much everything, and it looks like this," he said, gesturing at the loaves he had just pulled out of the oven.

However, when the baker moved to Canada and then

America, he found that having good bread was not as universal as it was in Europe. Sulea worked in the restaurant industry in Boston for years before deciding that he wanted to go back to school to study business. He enrolled at the University of Maine at Farmington, and loved the small college and the area. But he wasn't a big fan of the bread available there, so he dusted off old family recipes to make his own at home.

Those recipes call for only four ingredients — flour, yeast, salt and water — and require Sulea to pay constant attention to the dough, which is alive until the heat of the oven kills the yeast. He starts the dough the day before he bakes it, giving the yeast time to develop. Sulea, who said he can tell the temperature outside based on the way the dough feels, said that the humidity and the weather can affect the bread. Up to the time it goes into the oven, he can adjust the recipe accordingly by adding a little more flour or water, or baking it for a little more or less time.

"It's just as much of an art as a science," he said. "You have bad days and good days. You have to play along and make adjustments ... anything that's alive is not going to form its own personality if you impose your will on it."

After graduating from the University of Maine at Farmington, Sulea worked as an accountant for a while, but eventually decided that he wanted to move in a different direction.

"I wanted to do something that I love," he said, and thought about baking bread for a living. "Am I going to be happy and at peace making it? The answer was yes."

Two years ago this weekend, Sulea opened his bakery. He said he anticipates the anniversary — on Saturday, March 26, the day before Easter — to be very busy, as folks stock up on bread before the holiday.

He and his wife, Nicole Sulea, live in North Anson and both commute to their small businesses in downtown Waterville. Her shop, Heirloom Antiques & Vintage, is right next door to Universal Bread Bakers.

"I always liked Waterville," Adrian Sulea said. "Waterville has a lot of vitality. It has a lot of character."

He wanted to keep the prices low enough so that customers would not think of the bread as an occasional splurge, but as an everyday necessity, with most loaves costing \$4.

"At the end of the day, people still have to be able to afford it," he said. "Just because it touches my hands, it can't cost \$10."

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Sweet buns for Easter brunch

Europe and Eastern Europe are home to a pretty delectable array of yeast-raised sweet cakes and buns. Ruth

Thurston in Machias sent in this recipe for Buchteln, famous in Vienna, saying her family enjoyed them and thought I might, too. How we wouldn't like them, I cannot fathom: tender dough with eggs, butter and sugar beaten in, a little deposit of jam in the center, served with a bit of butter, a cup of coffee or tea. Perfect.



SANDY OLIVER
TASTE BUDS

Buchteln

Yields 18

¾ cups flour
1 tablespoon yeast dissolved in ¼ cups water
¾ cup milk, warmed
1 egg plus 1 yolk
1 teaspoon salt
Rind of one lemon, grated
1 stick of butter
Apricot jam, or your choice
Confectioner's sugar, optional

Mix together all the ingredients, except for the jam and confectioner's sugar. Beat well to make sure everything is well incorporated. The dough will be sticky.

Let rise covered with a damp cloth until doubled.

Turn out on a lightly floured board and divide into 18 little balls. Flatten each, placing a teaspoon of jam in the center. Pull the dough up around the jam and pinch it shut to seal in the jam. Put seam side down in two greased 9-by-9 pans.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Let rise until doubled again, then melt a tablespoon or so of butter and brush the tops of the buns with it.

Bake for about 30 minutes, then check to see whether they have a golden-brown top and/or sound a little hollow when you tap them gently.

Sprinkle with confectioner's sugar while warm. Best eaten while warm.

I dug out my mixer for this job because I wanted the butter well beaten in and because the dough hook can handle sticky dough better than my hands can. It went together very easily and quickly. An hour's rising while I did yard work, then came in to punch it down and divide it into 18 little balls, which I flattened to the size of my palm to take the jam I spooned on them. It takes a little practice to figure out how to pull the dough up around the filling and seal it all in. I missed on a couple, but the worst that happened was that those buns stuck
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New delis and lunch concepts elevate the midday repast

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — Lunch options in Maine's foodiest city are springing up like snowdrops and crocuses. At 2-week-old Hero in City Center, downtown workers are treated to much more than a sandwich and a bag of chips.

The chicken is slow-cooked on a rotisserie, the potato chips are hand sliced, the slaw is made with Brussels sprouts. The chickpeas are chili roasted. The half chicken for \$11.75 is easier on the wallet than most knife and fork sit-downs.

"It's not just chicken fingers and salads. It's substantial and healthy," said Max Brody, executive chef of Hero, located on the same block as Longfellow Books.

The new brainchild from the owners of OTTO and Empire Chinese Kitchen is doing more than keeping bellies fed; it's getting the

brown-bagging cubicle dwellers back out on the streets.

"I feel that a fast, consistent and elevated counter service lunch would be a welcomed and appreciated addition to Portland's food scene," said co-owner Todd Bernard.

And he is not alone with that hunch.

In early May, Sisters Gourmet Deli opens right around the corner in Monument Square.

Owner Michaela McVetty embarks on her fourth food venture in Portland with a tempting lunch array. The cheerful, prominent space last occupied by Wannawaf was vacant for two and a half years.

When Sisters opens, a new spark will hopefully quicken the pace of the business district.

"My model is KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid," said the bouncy 25-year-old. "I will make delicious sandwiches and salads and get

them to people as quickly and conveniently as possible."

She also promises free delivery to harried workers who can't leave their keyboards.

Though the menu is still to be finalized, she is perfecting a Dr. Pepper pork tenderloin sandwich.

"I did a taste test last week and there was almost bloodshed over the last one remaining," said McVetty, who was a partner in the now-shuttered White Cap Grille and Fit to Eat, both in Portland.

Lunch options include shredded superfoods salad consisting of brussels sprouts, kale and other healthful ingredients as well as a salmon wrap with spicy cilantro yogurt sauce, carrots, cucumbers, avocado and mixed greens.

"They will be light and nice for summer time," she added.

On neighboring Free Street, Tod Dana of El Rayo Taqueria ex-



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN

Chef Max Brody (right) and D.J. Nelson rustle up lunches at Hero, a new sandwich and rotisserie chicken joint off Monument Square in Portland on Monday.

pects to draw a different clientele when his second Portland Mexican restaurant opens in early June.

After shuttering last fall on York Street, the new El Rayo moves closer to the city center with a more focused "quick-serve" model.

"There are a lot fewer lunch options in the city compared to the

many restaurants serving dinner," said Dana.

Those night-time places, like Top of the East in the Westin Portland Harborview, also want to get in on the lunch rush. Right now the 15th-floor room opens at 4 and 5 p.m. and on Sunday brunch. But that may change come late spring.

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