

Cleo Coyle's Chocolate-Bottom Banana Bars

Text and photos (c) by Alice Alfonsi who writes [The Coffeehouse Mysteries](#) as [Cleo Coyle](#) with her husband, Marc Cerasini.

“Lovin’ from the oven” is how coffee hunter Matt Allegro jokingly described these fresh-baked squares in our *Coffeehouse Mystery* series, and Matt was right. The chocolate layer adds a nice twist to the traditional banana bar recipe. You’ll notice a bit of earthy espresso powder in that bottom layer as well. Yes, we’re coffee fiends, but here’s the truth: you won’t taste coffee, only a more powerful note of chocolate. As bakers know, espresso powder is a way to deepen the flavor of chocolate in recipes. These delectable bars also happen to go beautifully with a fresh, hot cup of joe. May you eat and read with joy! ~ Cleo

Yield: 16 squares (one 9-inch-square pan)

Ingredients:

2 cups mashed ripe* bananas (about 4 to 6 depending on size)

**See my note at the end of this recipe to ripen bananas in the oven*

1/4 cup sour cream

3/4 cup canola oil (or cold-pressed coconut oil, melt before measuring)

1/2 cup light brown sugar

1 egg, lightly beaten with fork

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1½ teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon baking soda

1/4 teaspoon table salt or finely ground sea salt

1½ cups all-purpose flour

1/4 cup baking cocoa (*unsweetened cocoa powder*)

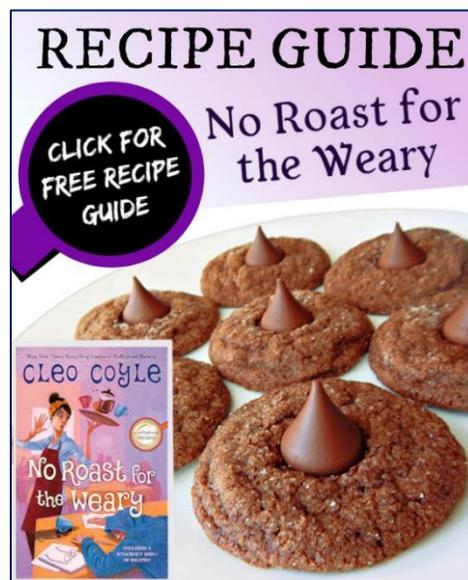
1/2 teaspoon espresso powder

1/2 cup chocolate chips

1/2 cup chopped walnuts (optional)



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Free Recipe Guide to
Cleo's new culinary mystery
No Roast for the Weary:
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Step 1—Prep oven and pan: First preheat your oven to 350° F. Line the bottom of a 9-inch-square pan with parchment paper, allowing the ends to hang over the side like handles. You'll use those handles to easily lift the baked banana bar slab out of the pan. Coat paper lightly with non-stick spray. Set aside.

Step 2—Make batter: Combine your 2 cups of mashed bananas and sour cream with a fork. Add the oil, sugar, egg, vanilla, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Fork-whisk well (or use an electric mixer) to blend until smooth. Now add your flour and mix until a lumpy batter forms, but do not over-mix at this stage.

Step 3—Create chocolate bottom: Remove 1 cup batter and place it into a separate bowl. Add cocoa and espresso powder, fork-whisking until the batter is smooth. Fold in chocolate chips, and (optional) chopped walnuts.

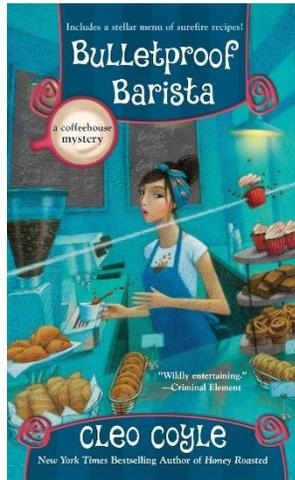
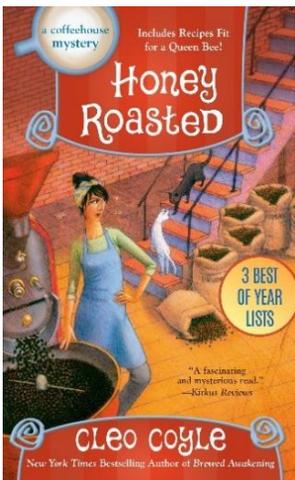
Step 4—Assemble and bake: Spread the chocolate batter across the entire bottom of the prepared pan. Take your time, using the back of a spoon to spread the batter all the way into the corners. Be sure the layer is even. Now pour your remaining banana batter on top and once again use the back of a spoon to even out the layer (otherwise your bars will bake up lopsided). Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Cool on a wire rack.



*** BANANA RIPENING NOTE:** To ripen bananas fast, place yellow bananas on a foil-covered baking sheet and bake at 350 F. for 10 minutes, turning once. Bananas will blacken. Peel right away (be careful, they're hot!) and cool flesh in fridge before mashing.



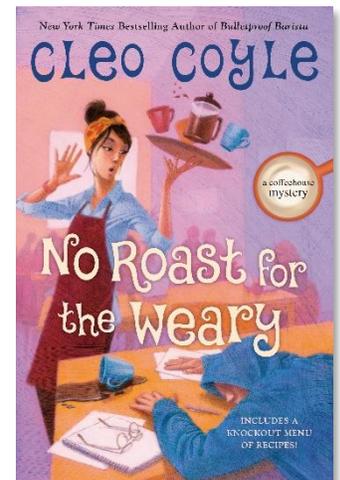
Eat with joy! ~ Cleo



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To learn more and see more recipes, visit Cleo Coyle's online coffeehouse at www.CoffeeshouseMystery.com

And her recipe blog at www.CleoCoyleRecipes.com



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