

A toast to love

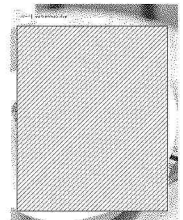
Story by KATE PARHAM KORDSMEIER

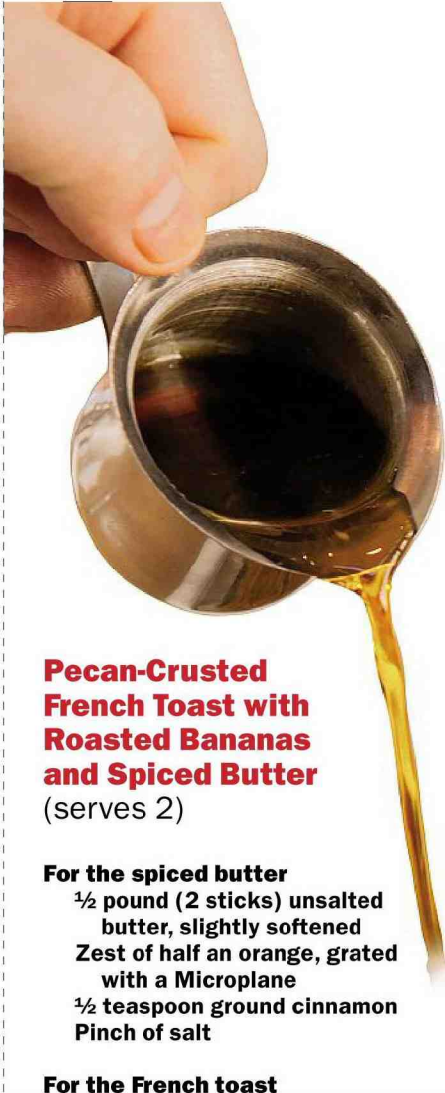


To make this Valentine's Day an affair to remember, considering skipping a pricey reservation at an overcrowded restaurant and instead surprise your sweetheart with breakfast in bed. A sweet, unexpected meal serves as a much more genuine and sentimental gesture, especially if you take care not to wake him or her when you slip out of bed early and return with mimosas in hand. Make Cupid proud by creating a beautiful tray, complete with plenty of syrup, napkins and reading material, to showcase the pecan-crusted French toast with roasted bananas and spiced butter from chef Todd Ginsberg of The General Muir.

You can find this recipe and more than 100 others in the just-released cookbook "Atlanta Chef's Table: Extraordinary Recipes from the Big Peach." The book gives you a behind-the-scenes look at how to make dishes from 75 of Atlanta's best restaurants, including favorites from star chefs like Anne Quatrano, Ford Fry, Gerry Klaskala, Billy Allin, Kevin Gillespie and Ginsberg. Don't miss other breakfast recipes, like West Egg's chilaquiles and Star Provisions' savory tart – though once you get a taste, your foolish heart may not want to stop with breakfast. "Atlanta Chef's Table: Extraordinary Recipes from the Big Peach" (Kate Parham Kordsmeier, \$26.95, published by Globe Pequot, an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield)

Roasted bananas and spiced butter top chef Todd Ginsberg's pecan-crusted French toast at The General Muir restaurant at Emory Point.





Pecan-Crusted French Toast with Roasted Bananas and Spiced Butter (serves 2)

For the spiced butter

- ½ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, slightly softened**
- Zest of half an orange, grated with a Microplane**
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- Pinch of salt**

For the French toast

- 1 ½ cups coarsely ground cornflakes (not too fine, not too pebbly)**
- 1 ½ cups coarsely ground pecans (not too fine, not too pebbly)**
- 4 eggs**
- 1/8 cup heavy cream**
- 1/8 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 4 (1-inch thick) slices challah (can substitute brioche)**
- 2 ounces clarified butter (can substitute half butter and half canola oil)**
- 1 large banana, peeled and quartered lengthwise**
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar, packed**
- Maple syrup for drizzling**

To make the spiced butter: Place the butter in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Mix at medium-high speed until smooth, about 3 minutes. Add the orange zest, cinnamon and salt. Mix at high speed until thoroughly combined, about 2 to 3 minutes. Pack the butter into a ramekin. Cover and chill in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

To make the French toast: Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees. Place the ground cornflakes and pecans in a pie plate or flat bowl and toss to combine. Set aside.

- Crack the eggs into another pie plate or flat bowl. Add the cream and vanilla and whisk until frothy and well combined.

- Dip each slice of bread in the egg mixture, making sure to coat evenly on both sides. (To get a thorough soak, you may need to let the bread rest in the egg for a minute or two per side. You want the bread to be soaked but not overly soggy and gooey.) Place the bread into the cornflake-pecan mixture and press gently so that it's coated on all sides.

- Heat clarified butter in a large ovenproof skillet over medium heat. Brown the bread on both sides, about 3-4 minutes per side. Place the skillet in the oven and bake until the bread puffs up and is just cooked through, about 5-8 minutes.

- Place the bananas in a medium-size ovenproof pan or baking tray and sprinkle with brown sugar. Broil under high heat to melt the brown sugar and caramelize the bananas, about 5 minutes. If the sugar runs off, spoon it back on top of the bananas.

- Place 2 slices of the cooked toast on a plate. Top with caramelized banana slices and a generous pat or two of the spiced butter. Drizzle with maple syrup. Serve with more maple syrup on the side. ■