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Bananas Foster

Serves 4

Developed in New Orleans in the 1950s, this dessert is easily assembled and guaranteed to satisfy all those around the table. The legend behind the dish stems from an abundance of bananas. At the time, New Orleans was a major port for banana imports. The chef, Paul Blangé, of famous New Orleans restaurant, Brennan's, devised the dessert to make use of the area's banana largesse. The dish was named for a friend of the restaurant's owner, Richard Foster. Whether or not the dish is flamed, the dessert's reputation as a delicious dessert is well-deserved.

Ingredients:

2 bananas, sliced diagonally
1 lemon, juiced
4 tablespoons salted butter
1/2 cup light brown sugar, packed
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons banana liqueur
1/4 cup white rum
1 pint vanilla ice cream
1/2 cup toasted, chopped pecans (optional)

Directions:

1. Gather and prep all the ingredients – this is a dish that happens quickly! (We even like to pre-scoop the ice cream and have it ready for the individual serving bowls.)
2. Peel, then cut the bananas on the diagonal into 1/2-inch thick slices. Toss the slices with the lemon juice to reduce browning. (The original Bananas Foster cuts the bananas in half lengthwise; we like the more manageable diagonal slices for easier serving and eating.)
3. In a low-sided skillet, melt the butter and add the brown sugar and cinnamon. Allow the mixture to heat and become bubbly.
4. Add the banana slices carefully – the butter-sugar mixture is very hot and can create splatters. Allow the slices to cook on one side for 45-60 seconds, gently turn the slices, and cook for another 45-60 seconds. The idea is to warm the bananas, not to cook or become mushy.
5. Remove the skillet from heat. Add the banana liqueur and white rum. Return the skillet to the burner, and allow the mixture to become warm again. As the mixture bubbles, the alcohol will burn off. If you choose to flambé the dish, carefully light the mixture just as it becomes warm again and before any alcohol burns off; the flames will erupt and burn off in about 30 seconds. (Have a lid handy to quickly extinguish any out of control flaming.)
6. Once the alcohol has evaporated, or burned off, spoon the bananas and sauce over scoops of vanilla ice cream. Sprinkle with the pecans, and serve immediately.