

Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce 'tastes like home'

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MACE & CROWN

Gina "Gin-Gin" Rodgers' description of southern-style banana pudding could make mouths water. She paints a mental picture of her father, Reginald "Reggie" Rodgers, in the kitchen making banana pudding from scratch. He was making it the same way his mother Polly Rodgers did when he was young. Meanwhile, Gina would be sitting up on the counter, her feet dangling, contemplating whether or not she should steal the pot as her impatience took over.

She used to help her father make the banana pudding sauce, consisting of egg yolk, vanilla extract, flour and milk, which has been a family favorite at every event.

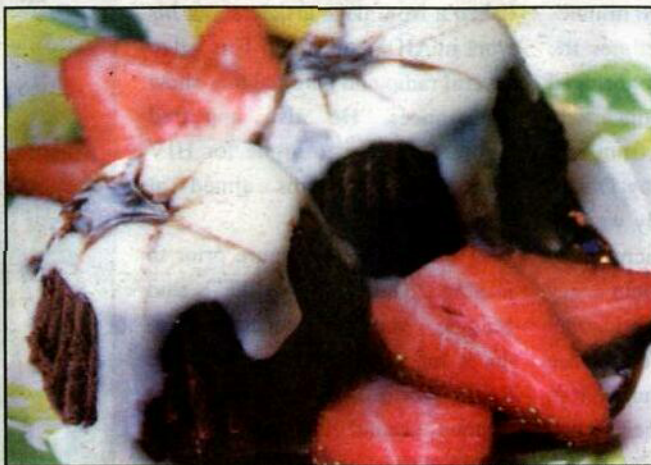
"Anytime anybody invites my family to go anywhere, they always expect the banana pudding sauce," Rodgers said. "So we can't really do the mini versions like we want to do, we have to make the big one."

One time, her father said he didn't want to make the banana pudding sauce for a party they had at their house, and everyone noticed the sauce was missing. "People were like going through the cabinets, 'Where's the banana pudding sauce? I know you made some banana pudding,'" Rodgers said.

Rodgers has helped her father bring his infamous banana pudding sauce from their kitchen to other kitchens. January was their launching date. Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce is sold at the Farmer's Market in Norfolk. Rodgers said the 16-ounce jar is \$6 and the 32-ounce jar is \$10.

Rodgers said the sauce can last up to three months refrigerated and is the added ingredient to banana pudding. However, the banana pudding sauce, with its milky, vanilla taste, also blends well with other foods.

"I'm a fruit lover, so anything with fruit and just dunking it, and I'm good," Rodgers said. "Or even ice cream, I've had that lately with it, it's so good. It hits the spot." Gina said she has tested the sauce with apples, strawberries, peaches, blackberries and blueberries.



A 16-ounce bottle of Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce costs \$6 at the Farmer's Market in Norfolk. COURTESY PHOTO

Rodgers isn't much of a cook. She leaves it up to her father. She was more in charge of insisting to get the name out there.

Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce seems to be completely run by the family. "If it wasn't for my mom, who was like the hub cap, I probably would have a lemonade stand selling all of this," Rodgers said. "She just went flying with it."

Jump-starting Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce included making sure the space where they were making it was sanitary, getting nutrition facts for the product, and networking.

Her sister Charizza is their "focus group," Rodgers said. "If we need a third opinion on anything, to be like the tie-breaker on any decisions, we go to her."

Now Rowena's Inc. is making their banana pudding sauce. It was a major change going from seeing her father make the banana pudding sauce, sitting on the kitchen counter, to seeing it being manufactured.

"[Rowena's are] the ones who make it. It's so cool to watch, too. Basically they [have] 30 to 50 gallon. I don't know, [bowls] and a giant whisk, and they're just doing it by hand and just whisking it out, I'm just like, 'Man that's awesome,'" she said.

Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce is included as one of Vir-

ginia's Finest Trademark Programs, in the sauces and condiments category.

"They tasted it, they made a couple changes to things like the labels, things that we needed to put on the label, and then they were just like, 'It's good. We like it. Tastes fantastic,'" Rodgers said. Her response to the reaction: "Yesssssss!"

Restaurants that use their sauce on desserts include Victorian Station in Hampton and HK on the Bay in Virginia Beach, giving Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce exposure. The restaurants purchase Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce and experiment with it, adding it to different desserts, such as bread pudding at Victorian Station, Rodgers said.

"We have had specials at other restaurants, which we will probably continue to do, but we're definitely trying to get into universities, stores," she said. "We're definitely going to be trying to become almost like Rowena's, as in the local favorite, something very easy and quick just for somebody to put out there."

Adding Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce to banana pudding is quick and easy for anyone.

"If you want to basically look like a culinary savant, in front of your friends, come up with something creative with the banana pudding sauce," she said. "Something quick, easy, tell your friends 'Look what I made from scratch.'"

Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce is great for mothers who are in a hurry to make something quick, kids who want a snack and single people who come home from work and want coffee, banana pudding and a bubble bath, Rodgers said.

In the future, Rodgers hopes to get Reggie's Banana Pudding Sauce sold in stores such as Farm Fresh. Upcoming events they will be a part of include the Foodbank in April. They also hope to be a part of the Jazz Festival and Children's Festival.

"We're definitely going to see where this goes, and we'll definitely see what happens from there," Rodgers said.