

Pear-Cardamom Sour Cream Coffee Cake Muffins

Recipe 28 of 365

Inspired by a pear-cardamom flavored muffin at Seattle's new Volunteer Park Café, these delicate, moist muffins are a shout-out to coffee cake, with plenty of crumbly coffee cake topping that fills the house with cardamom essence when it bakes. Since the muffins have a fairly light crumb, I found it best to let them cool entirely in the (well-greased) muffin tins, so that when you take them out you get whole muffins instead of tops and separate bottoms.

You can peel the pears if you choose (especially if you use a pear with a thick skin, such as Bosc), but unpeeled worked fine for me. I used six small seckel pears.

TIME: 30 minutes

MAKES: 12 big muffins

Vegetable oil spray

For the topping:

1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts

1/4 cup sugar

1/4 cup (packed) brown sugar

1 teaspoon ground cardamom

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

For the muffins:

2 medium almost-ripe pears, such as d'Anjou, or equivalent

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1/2 cup whole wheat flour (or more all-purpose)

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon ground cardamom

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter, room temperature

1 cup sugar

1/4 cup (packed) brown sugar

2 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup (8 ounces) sour cream

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Liberally grease a 12-cup muffin tin with the vegetable oil spray, both in the muffin depressions and on top of the tin, and set aside. (If you use muffin liners, grease the top of the muffin pan, as the muffins are large and will spread out onto the top of the pan – or use 2 muffin pans and make smaller muffins.)

Make the topping: combine all the topping ingredients together in a small bowl, mix well, and set aside.

Make the muffin batter: first, chop the pears (peeled or unpeeled) into 1/2" chunks. You should have enough to measure 1 1/2 cups. Place the flours, baking powder, baking soda, cardamom, and salt in a medium bowl and whisk to blend, and set aside.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or using a hand-held electric mixer), cream the butter and both sugars together on medium speed until fluffy and very light yellow, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula, and mix again to blend. Add the eggs, one at a time, and blend on low, mixing between additions and scraping down the sides of the bowl when necessary, until the eggs are completely incorporated. Mix in the vanilla.

With the mixer on low, add first about a third of the flour mixture, then half the sour cream, then another third of the flour mixture, then the rest of the sour cream, and finally the last of the flour mixture, mixing between each addition until whatever was last added has just barely been incorporated. Remove the paddle or beaters, add the chopped pears (and anything else you might want to add, like nuts or flax seeds), and stir just until blended.

Spoon an equal amount of batter into each of the muffin tins (the batter will probably fill the cups a little more than full before you put them in the oven, unless you choose to make smaller muffins). Sprinkle the topping over the batter, using your fingers or a spoon, if necessary, to push the topping into the batter so it adheres better.

Bake the muffins on a middle rack for 20 to 25 minutes, or until well browned and a toothpick inserted into the center of one of the muffins comes out with just a few crumbs clinging to it. (If you make more smaller muffins, bake them only 15 to 20 minutes, and switch the pans top to bottom halfway through baking.) Let the muffins cool in the pans. Use a small spatula to cut between the muffin tops to loosen them from each other, and carefully pry them out of the pans. (These are not muffins that you can dump out of the pan by turning it upside-down.) Enjoy.

Store any uneaten muffins in an airtight container at room temperature, up to 3 days, or cool and freeze up to 2 months.