

I can't help but love foods that are extremely versatile. Breakfast for dinner or brunch for dessert? When I try to think of a good food to fit this category, the following recipe is what always comes to mind.

Now I am going to be really honest with you all. One of my favorite foods in the entire world is bread pudding. I think that the only other treat that even comes close to comparison would be warm, homemade vanilla pudding. Yum!

When my husband and I were on our honeymoon in Hawaii, we had an incredible buffet style breakfast each morning. We were there eight days and I don't think I could have possibly tried every food in that amount of time.

I was certainly sure to take a heaping scoop of bread pudding each morning though. It was the most delicious bread pudding I have ever eaten. I would say it was the best meal I ate the whole time we were there, aside from the Kahlua Pork, but that is for another column.

I can only dream of finding that perfect recipe somewhere, but for now, this mix and match recipe is pretty darn good. Each bite takes me back to mornings on the beach and waking up to the sound of rustling palm trees.

▣ ***Almost Perfect Bread Pudding***

2 eggs VANILLA SAUCE:

2 cups scalded milk 1/3 cup sugar

1/4 cup butter, cubed 2 tablespoons cornstarch

3/4 cup sugar 1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon salt 1-2/3 cups cold water

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

3 tablespoons butter

1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

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4-1/2 to 5 cups soft bread cubes

(about 9 slices)

1/2 cup raisins, optional

In a bowl, lightly beat eggs. Combine milk and butter, add to eggs along with sugar, spices and vanilla. Add bread cubes and raisins, if desired; stir gently. Pour into a well-greased 11-in. x 7-in. baking dish. Bake at 350° for 40-45 minutes or until a knife inserted 1 in. from edge comes out clean.

Meanwhile, for sauce, combine the sugar, cornstarch and salt in a saucepan. Stir in water until smooth. Bring to a boil over medium heat; cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Remove from the heat. Stir in the butter, vanilla and nutmeg. Serve with warm pudding.