Applesauce Spice Loaf

My father’s father, Jack Pinner, was an entertaining, talkative man. He was the kind of man who had so many life stories that he could transition from one story to another without pausing.

Grandpa Jack also used the freedom of speech that’s afforded to old people as justification for speaking his mind. Grandpa Jack, who was divorced from Daddy’s mother, Mary Lee, came to live with my parents for the last stretch of his life. By that time, he’d spent most of his savings on the things old men spend their money on—thick slabs of delicatessen cheese and bologna, fishing tackle and hunting gear, and younger women. Once, we were sitting down to a late breakfast, and Mama had baked one of her tasty applesauce loaves. Grandpa Jack turned to Daddy and said, in front of everybody, “Son, your wife might be a little on the uppity side, but she sure can make a tasty loaf.” Everybody got a chuckle out of it—even Mama, who chose to focus on the compliment rather than the snide remark.

The way I remember it, Grandpa loved Mama’s Applesauce Spice Loaf better than any of her other sweet loaves. It has a comforting, old-fashioned, downhome flavor that no doubt reminded him of the treats that he’d grown up with.

This loaf calls for simple pantry ingredients that you probably already have on hand. I love it when simple things come together to produce something delicious.

*Makes 1 9-inch x 5-inch x 3-inch loaf (about 12 servings)*

**TOPPING**

2 teaspoons granulated sugar

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

**BATTER**

Nonstick cooking spray, for greasing

2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

¼ teaspoon salt

⅛ teaspoon ground allspice

1 cup unsweetened applesauce

½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled

½ cup granulated sugar

⅓ cup firmly packed light brown sugar

1 whole large egg, room temperature

1 large egg yolk, room temperature

2 tablespoons apple cider (not sparkling)

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

½ cup chopped pecans or walnuts

1. *To make the topping*: In a small mixing bowl, combine the granulated sugar and cinnamon and stir well. Set aside.

2. Preheat the oven to 350° F. Grease a 9-inch x 5-inch x 3-inch loaf pan with the cooking spray and line the bottom of the pan with parchment paper. Grease the parchment and dust the sides and bottom of the pan with some flour. Shake out the excess flour. Set the pan aside.

3. *To make the batter:* In a large mixing bowl, sift together the dry ingredients: the flour, cinnamon, baking powder, baking soda, nutmeg, salt, and allspice. Set aside.

4. In a separate large mixing bowl, whisk together the applesauce, butter, granulated and brown sugars, egg, egg yolk, apple cider, and vanilla extract until the mixture is smooth. Gently stir the flour mixture into the applesauce mixture ⅓ at a time until just combined. Fold the nuts into the batter until well distributed.

5. Transfer the batter to the prepared pan. Evenly sprinkle the batter with the topping and bake for 45 to 50 minutes, until a wooden toothpick inserted into the center of the loaf comes out clean. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool in the pan on a wire rack for 15 minutes.

6. Turn out the loaf onto the wire rack and allow to cool completely.

7. Transfer to a serving platter, slice, and serve at room temperature.

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