

Prep Time: 25 minutes | Cook Time: 10 minutes | Chill Time: 2 hours | Total Time: ~2 hours 35 minutes
Difficulty: Easy | Intensity Level: Low (light stirring and layering; no special techniques)

Table of Contents

- ◆
 - [Ingredients](#)
 - [Cookie Base](#)
 - [Caramel Layer](#)
 - [Pudding Layer](#)
 - [Assembly](#)
 - [Equipment](#)
 - [Step-by-Step Instructions](#)
 - [Step 1: Make the Cookie Base \(5 minutes | Low intensity\)](#)
 - [Step 2: Cook the Caramel \(10 minutes | Medium intensity — requires attention\)](#)
 - [Step 3: Whisk the Pudding \(3 minutes | Low intensity\)](#)
 - [Step 4: Whip the Cream \(3–4 minutes | Medium intensity\)](#)
 - [Step 5: Assemble the Cups \(5 minutes | Low intensity\)](#)
 - [Step 6: Chill \(2 hours | No active work\)](#)
 - [Step 7: Serve](#)
 - [Timing & Intensity Summary](#)
 - [Recipe Notes & Variations](#)
 - [Nutrition Information \(per cup, estimated\)](#)

Ingredients

Cookie Base

- 1½ cups (about 150 g) vanilla wafer cookies or shortbread cookies, crushed
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar (optional, if using plain shortbread)

Caramel Layer

- ½ cup (100 g) granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons water
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cubed
- ¼ cup (60 ml) heavy cream, warmed
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt (for a salted caramel finish)

Pudding Layer

- 1 box (3.4 oz / 96 g) instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1¾ cups (420 ml) cold whole milk

- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Assembly

- 3 medium ripe bananas, sliced into ¼-inch rounds
 - 1 cup (240 ml) heavy whipping cream
 - 2 tablespoons powdered sugar
 - ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
 - Optional garnish: extra crushed cookies, caramel drizzle, banana chips
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Equipment

- 6 clear cups or small jars (8-10 oz each)
- Medium saucepan
- Whisk

- Mixing bowls (medium and large)
 - Electric hand mixer or balloon whisk
 - Rubber spatula
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Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Make the Cookie Base (5 minutes | Low intensity)

In a medium bowl, combine the crushed cookies, melted butter, and sugar (if using). Stir until the mixture resembles damp sand. Spoon about 2 tablespoons into the bottom of each cup and press down gently with the back of a spoon or a small glass. Set aside. *Tip: Don't press too firmly—you want a tender crumb, not a brick.*

Step 2: Cook the Caramel (10 minutes | Medium intensity — requires attention)

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine the sugar and water. Stir gently just until the sugar dissolves, then stop stirring. Let the mixture bubble undisturbed for 5–8 minutes until it turns a deep amber color. Watch closely—caramel goes from golden to burnt in seconds.

Reduce heat to low, then carefully whisk in the butter (the mixture will bubble up). Slowly pour in the warm cream while whisking until smooth. Stir in the salt. Remove from heat and pour into a heatproof bowl. Let cool for 10 minutes. *Safety note: caramel is extremely hot—keep hands and face away from the steam.*

Step 3: Whisk the Pudding (3 minutes | Low intensity)

In a medium bowl, whisk the pudding mix, cold milk, and vanilla for about 2 minutes until it begins to thicken. Let it sit for 5 minutes to set further. *Note: If you prefer homemade pudding, cook it per your favorite recipe and cool completely before assembling.*

Step 4: Whip the Cream (3-4 minutes | Medium intensity)

In a large chilled bowl, beat the heavy cream, powdered sugar, and vanilla with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until soft-to-medium peaks form, about 3-4 minutes. Do not overbeat. Refrigerate until needed.

Step 5: Assemble the Cups (5 minutes | Low intensity)

Build each cup in this order:

1. Cookie base (already in the cups)
2. 1 tablespoon caramel
3. A few banana slices in a single layer
4. 2-3 tablespoons pudding
5. 1 teaspoon caramel
6. Another layer of banana slices

- 7. 2 tablespoons pudding
- 8. A dollop of whipped cream

Repeat for all six cups. Drizzle the tops with the remaining caramel and sprinkle with crushed cookies.

Step 6: Chill (2 hours | No active work)

Cover each cup loosely with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours (or up to 24 hours) so the flavors meld and the base softens slightly. Add the final whipped cream dollop just before serving if making ahead more than 6 hours.

Step 7: Serve

Garnish with banana chips or a fresh banana slice (brush with lemon juice to prevent browning) and a final drizzle of caramel. Serve chilled.

Timing & Intensity Summary

Stage	Time	Intensity	Heat Level
Cookie base	5 min	Low	None
Caramel	10 min	Medium (constant attention)	Medium → Low
Pudding	3 min + 5 min set	Low	None
Whipped cream	3-4 min	Medium	None
Assembly	5 min	Low	None
Chill	2 hours	None	Refrigerator

Make-ahead plan: The caramel can be made up to 1 week ahead and stored covered in the fridge (warm gently to loosen). Assembled cups keep up to 24 hours, though bananas soften over time—best within 12 hours.

Recipe Notes & Variations

- Banana browning: A light toss of banana slices in lemon or orange juice slows oxidation, but assembling close to serving is the best defense.
- Salted caramel: The $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt gives a lovely contrast; omit for a sweeter, classic caramel.
- Chocolate twist: Add 2 tablespoons cocoa powder to the cookie base or drizzle melted chocolate between layers.
- Bourbon caramel: Stir 1 teaspoon bourbon into the caramel after removing it from the heat.
- Gluten-free: Use gluten-free shortbread or certified GF vanilla wafers.
- No instant pudding? Use 2 cups of cooled homemade vanilla pastry cream instead.
- Storage: Keep covered in the refrigerator for up to 2 days. Not suitable for freezing (the cream and bananas will weep).

Nutrition Information (per cup, estimated)

Based on 6 servings using whole milk and vanilla wafers. Values are approximate and will vary by brand and portion size.

Nutrient	Amount per Serving
Calories	~430 kcal
Total Fat	~22 g
— Saturated Fat	~13 g
Cholesterol	~62 mg
Sodium	~260 mg
Total Carbohydrates	~55 g
— Sugars	~40 g
— Dietary Fiber	~1 g
Protein	~4 g
Vitamin D	~4% DV
Calcium	~10% DV
Iron	~4% DV
Potassium	~250 mg