

**OCADO
OWN RANGE**

PICK OF THE BUNCH

To celebrate Fairtrade Fortnight from 27th February, we get under the skin of Ocado Own Range Fairtrade Bananas. Meet Marlenis Mejia, a Colombian farmer with big love for her dedos.

I've always been bananas about bananas – and even more so since I inherited this banana farm, in Guacamayal, Colombia, from my mother-in-law in 1997. She called it La Lola, and when I took over, we changed the name to La Lolita (Little Lola) in tribute.

Growing bananas reminds me of tidying up after my children when they were young! Every day we cut down and clear fallen or browning leaves. It means the bananas grow better, and makes the plant healthier from root to tip.

Bananas are actually berries. They take about nine months to grow and we harvest two varieties, Grand Nain and Valery, both of which have a good texture and richness.

In Colombia, we call individual bananas dedos, which means fingers. The stems we grow can hold around 150 dedos. On harvesting day, 12 of us work together to make sure everything gets done in time. Once we're happy, we pack the bananas up, ready for Ocado.

Our cooperative is like a family, and I like that we work together. It's called Coobamag, and our bananas are shipped all over the world. This area of Santa Marta in Colombia grows lots of bananas, because the climate is just right.

I'm thankful that I can work my own land and see all that I've achieved. Becoming certified Fairtrade changed our lives, and La Lolita now means more to me than just work – it's how I've been able to improve my quality of life and that of my family.

I eat green banana mashed with cheese, butter and milk for breakfast – a dish called cayeye. Another favourite of mine is patacones (crispy fried banana), which are a delicious snack after a hard day's work, and my daughter makes the most fantastic banana biscuits.

Farm owner Marlenis has supplied bananas to Ocado for over 10 years. Bananas grown in the banana zone of Santa Marta, Colombia, are Fairtrade certified, traded and audited for Ocado.



Ocado Own Range Fairtrade Bananas

Try them baked in our creamy pud, overleaf.

Photography **Jorge Oviedo** Words **Ross Clarke**. Prices are correct at the time of going to print but may be subject to change



BANOFFEE VIBES

BANANA PUDDING WITH HAZELNUT MERINGUE

This fruity, custardy concoction is the ultimate comfort pud. We take things up a notch with a nutty, golden-brown meringue topping.

Serves 6 • Hands-on 20 mins
• Total time 40 mins, plus cooling and overnight chilling

Ingredients

2tbsp cornflour
 150g caster sugar
 375ml whole milk
 3 large eggs, separated
 1½tbsp vanilla extract
 1tbsp rum (optional)
 320g shortbread biscuits, crushed
 3-4 ripe **Ocado Own Range Fairtrade Bananas**
 50g blanched hazelnuts, chopped

1. Put the cornflour, 75g of the sugar, the milk and a pinch of salt in a heavy-based saucepan and use a balloon whisk to combine. Gently warm over a low heat for about 2 mins, or until just steaming.
2. Meanwhile, lightly beat the egg yolks in a bowl (pop the whites in the fridge

until needed) with a balloon whisk. Whisk a splash of the steaming milk mixture into the yolks, then slowly pour in the rest, whisking constantly, until smooth.

3. Pour the mixture back into the saucepan (keeping the bowl to one side) and return to a medium-low heat. Cook for 3-4 mins, stirring with a spatula, until thickened to roughly the consistency of mayonnaise. Pour back into the reserved bowl and stir in the vanilla and the rum, if using. Cover with cling film, pressing it onto the surface of the pudding to stop a skin forming; leave to cool completely.
4. To assemble, sprinkle half the crushed shortbread biscuits over the base of a deep 30cm x 20cm baking dish. Slice the bananas and scatter half over the biscuit layer, then top with half of the cooled pudding mixture, spreading it out into the corners. Repeat the layers with the remaining shortbread, bananas and pudding mixture, then cover and chill for at least 3 hrs or, ideally, overnight.
5. Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas 4. Whisk the egg whites with an electric whisk to soft peaks. Add 1tbsp of the remaining sugar and beat again until starting to stiffen. Gradually whisk in the rest of the sugar until you have

a thick, shiny meringue that holds stiff peaks, then stir through the hazelnuts.

6. Spread the meringue over the pudding layer, creating decorative peaks with the back of a spoon. Bake for 10-15 mins, until the meringue is golden brown. Leave to cool for 20 mins before serving, or serve it chilled, if you prefer. This is best eaten on the same day, while the meringue remains crisp. Leftovers will keep in the fridge for 1-2 days, but the meringue will soften.

PER SERVING 604cals, 26g fat (12g saturated), 12g protein, 79g carbs, 49g sugars, 3g fibre, 0.6g salt

USE IT UP

Peel, slice and freeze ripe bananas before they turn black, then whizz in a blender to make speedy (and dairy-free) banana 'ice cream'.

