

Brake for Banana Pudding

We set out to find the prime places for this Southern specialty in North Carolina.

We spooned a lot of banana pudding across the state in search of the best. Sometimes we needed just one bite. On other occasions we sat scraping the sides of bowls because licking them would have been improper. Whether you agree or disagree, we want to hear from you. Tell us your favorite place for banana pudding on our message boards at southernliving.com/december2007.

—TANNER C. LATHAM

Get It at Gary's

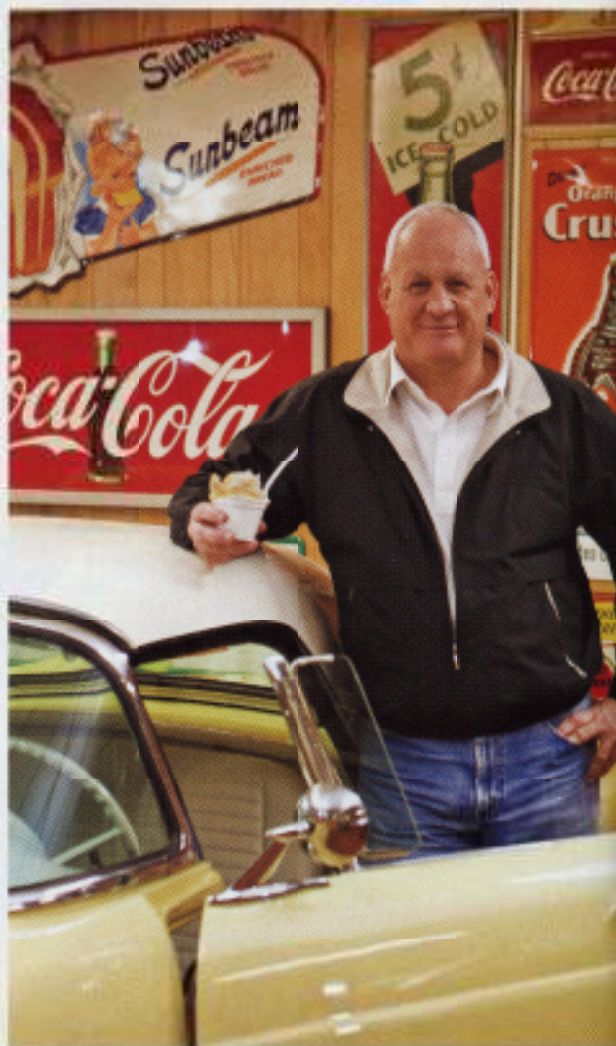
"The girls in the back pile the cup really high," says Gary Ritchie of Gary's Bar-B-Q north of Charlotte (1 mile from Exit 68 off I-85). "You get about a half pound for \$1.75. It's really too much for one person." That's what he thinks.

Gary broke into the barbecue biz almost 40 years ago when he bought an abandoned Gulf service station in China Grove. **Editor's tip:** Before the pudding, try a tray of chopped pork. Gary is an equal-opportunity saucer, offering a sweet and smoky ketchup-based sauce alongside a thin, peppery vinegar sauce.

The pudding comes from his wife's recipe, and he swears there's nothing special about it. Must be the atmosphere then. Antique signs touting oil, soda pop, and tobacco hang on the wood-paneled walls throughout the joint. Or it could be the fact that they scoop the pudding like ice cream, perfectly blending the wafers, pudding, real bananas, and whipped cream.

Gary's Bar-B-Q: 620 U.S. 29 North, China Grove; (704) 857-8314.

above, right: Gary Ritchie of Gary's Bar-B-Q decorates his restaurant with a couple of 1950s Thunderbirds—but go for the banana pudding. *right:* Clara Marie's banana pudding features crumbled graham crackers instead of the ubiquitous vanilla wafers.



Our Favorite "Produce"

It's a little bit trickier to find our other favorite, but we guarantee every step will be worth it. Circumnavigate the Greensboro Farmers Curb Market (open year-round on Saturdays) until you find Karla Comer's booth. She and her business partner, Bradford Hines, are the masters behind Clara Marie's Authentic Southern Bakery. This is the only place she sells her banana pudding—some of the creamiest you've ever put in your mouth. Karla attributes its great taste to three of the key ingredients: heavy cream, sweetened condensed milk, and a ground graham cracker crust. **Editor's tip:** She serves it only in a 16-ounce cup (\$4) so bring your friends and request extra spoons.

Clara Marie's Authentic Southern Bakery: (336) 392-6612
Greensboro Farmers Curb Market: 501 Yanceyville Street, (336) 373-2402. Open 6 a.m.-noon Saturday year-round. •