Date Nut Bread

My mother-in-law makes fantastically delicious date nut *cakes* every Christmas, and I'll never admit how many we go through in a single week. But this date nut *bread* recipe is different, and it harkens back to my pre-mother-in-law youth. If you do not smother it with cream cheese, don't talk to me.

8 ounces moist, sticky dates (either Medjool or deglet noor), pitted and chopped
3/4 cup boiling water
3/4 cup whole wheat pastry flour
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup nut meal of your choice (I used almond meal, but you can finely grind walnuts)
3/4 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon *each* cardamom and ginger
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 eggs, at room temperature
1/3 cup dark brown sugar
1/2 cup canola oil
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup walnuts, rough-chopped or left big, toasted if desired

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9x5-inch loaf pan with nonstick spray.

Place dates in a small bowl or 2-cup glass measuring cup and pour the boiling water on top. Push down the dates to submerge. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and set aside to soften for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, whisk the dry ingredients (whole wheat pastry flour through salt) together in a large mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, whisk the eggs, brown sugar, oil, and vanilla.

When dates are ready, pour off the water into a small bowl and reserve the liquid. Transfer dates to a small food processor, add back 3 tablespoons of the date soaking water (discard the rest), and puree until thick, uniform, and sticky. You should have one cup of date paste. Transfer paste to the egg mixture and whisk well to combine.

Add the wet ingredients to the dry, and stir well with a rubber spatula, sweeping the bottom of the bowl to ensure that all flour particles are absorbed. Do not overmix. Fold in the walnuts.

Scrape batter into the prepared loaf pan and bake in the center of the oven for 55 minutes, or until a skewer comes out clean. Cool on a wire rack. When loaf has fully cooled, slice, and slather with cream cheese. (To store, wrap the fully cooled loaf tightly with foil. The flavor and texture actually improve with age.)

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