

Gluten-Free Baking Tip Sheet

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There are a few things worth knowing when it comes to gluten-free baking if you want the best tasting foods that have the right texture and appearance. The tips offered below are included in my cookbook in greater detail so this is the abbreviated version of key points for success.

1. Avoid using rice flour for all your baked goods

I recommend NOT using rice flour for all of your baked goods because rice is the common denominator in prepackaged gluten-free foods and mixes. Eating too much rice can set you on a path to eventually become allergic or intolerant to rice. This happened to my son after a mere 18 months on the gluten-free diet. I am not suggesting that everyone would become allergic to rice if they ate it daily, but some people have a higher propensity to develop food allergies or intolerances in the first place. This is simply a word to the wise.

Imagine being on the gluten-free diet and not being able to tolerate rice. It was a very painful experience and one that is worth avoiding. Because of my experience, I have carefully developed baked goods that use the less popular non-rice gluten-free flours, which quite frankly was not an easy task. As I have marketed my cookbook, I have encountered a surprisingly high number of people who shared my experience of becoming allergic or intolerant to rice.

2. Combine flours for better texture

For the best texture I recommend using a combination of flours. There are many gluten-free flours available today including garfava, tapioca, millet, sorghum, amaranth, rice, buckwheat, quinoa and teff to name the more common flours. Potato starch and corn flours are also often used. The trick in combining flours is to use them in a way that yields a good tasting baked good that also has the right texture, which is not an easy task unless you stick to the bland flours like rice, tapioca, potato and corn. This is the reason that my recipes and other recipes use combinations of flours.

3. Measuring flour can make all the difference in the world

A cup of wheat flour does not equal a cup of gluten-free flour which is why historically Bette Hagman, the pioneer of gluten-free baking, recommended sifting your flour or tapping the side of the measuring cup repeatedly to have the flour settle. After years of sifting and tapping I invented the “heap and dump” method of placing as much flour on top of the measuring cup until it would hold no more – a method to replace the more tedious sifting or tapping techniques. If you don’t use one of these three techniques, you will most likely be short on the flour called for in my recipes and many others. Less experienced bakers don’t understand the rationale behind such methodology.

A cup of wheat flour equals about $\frac{7}{8}$ cup of gluten-free flour. In a typical 3-cup flour recipe, if you did not use this technique, you would be short $\frac{1}{8}$ cup of flour and then would end up with too much liquid.

4. Get an oven thermometer

I strongly advocate using an oven thermometer, the inexpensive kind that hangs on your oven rack inside the oven, to make sure your oven runs at the right temperature. Gluten-free baked goods that are free of dairy, eggs and other allergens are much more sensitive to oven temperature. Based on my experience most ovens are off by 25 to 50 degrees running either too hot or too cool. I have taught baking classes for years and it never fails that someone who has repeated failures begins to be wildly successful after getting an oven thermometer and finding out that their oven temperature is off. Once you know, you then simply adjust your baking temperature to correct for the difference.

5. Hold back some liquid until you are sure you need it

Even if you use proper flour measuring techniques, I recommend that you hold back some liquid for the reason that flours from different companies have different properties (see below) and on any given day you may measure flour differently. I have made up mixes and multiple batches of one food item in a day and found that the amount of liquid varies. It never hurts to hold back some of the liquid until you are sure you need it.

6. Use a proven recipe

In the beginning I printed off recipes from list servers and the internet and then wondered why I had flop after flop when I had over 20 years as an expert baker. It was not until I purchased a reputable cookbook, one of Bette Hagmans, that I realized why – it wasn't my baking abilities or my technique it was the recipe. Recipes make all the difference in the world in this specialty baking area.

7. Smaller pans often work better

Especially in the gluten-free, dairy-free and egg-free category, smaller pans usually result in better baked goods. Where and when I can, I opt for the smaller pan than a larger pan.

8. Flour quality can make or break a baked good

Several years ago I purchased gluten-free flour in bulk and my baked goods turned out terrible. I never thought it might be the flour until it became painfully obvious it was a repeating pattern. I then purchased the same flour from the same company, in a smaller package, and my next batch of baked goods came out perfectly. The company, by the way was happy to take back their flour and give me credit. They did however refuse to share with me the results of their testing (I had requested it be tested and the results be shared

with me). This has happened on at least two occasions. I don't think it happens very often, but it does indeed happen.

9. In the beginning do not substitute

In my humble opinion, if at all possible select a recipe that you can use "as is" and do not make any substitutions. The reason for that is that substitutions can completely alter any baked good when it comes to gluten-free baking. I have a chocolate cake recipe that I had used for maybe 8 years that was delicious, easy and that came out every time. Once when I tried to substitute different flours and it was a disaster!

Imagine my surprise over this since no one in the gluten-free baking world talks about this, which I think is because most gluten-free bakers do not use any more than the "bland" flours. Once you get a few recipes that work well with no substitutions, then you know you have the knack and you can start experimenting. It is very expensive, not to mention time consuming to have repeat gluten-free flops.

10. "Recycle" any GF baking mistakes

If a baked good does not come out well save the item and figure out how to "recycle" it. Rolls or bread can be dried out for breadcrumbs or toasted with some spices and made into croutons. Cookies that are less than desirable can be crushed and used in a dessert. As long as the food tastes somewhat decent there is usually a way to find a use for it.

For more tips and baking videos, visit my website. If you have baking questions, please post them on my blog, which will guarantee the fastest response. Yes, I do want your baking questions because I want more than anything for you to have success.