

Chef Shares Tips for Gluten-Free Holiday Desserts

Written by Ginny Grimsley

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Have Your Cake and Feel Good, Too, Says Award-Winning Baker

If there's one downside to fabulous, food-filled holiday celebrations, it's the gurgles and groans of post-feasting indigestion.

"We assume it's because we overate, but for a lot of people, that pain and sick feeling may not be about how *much* you ate but *what* you ate," says Kyra Bussanich, (www.kyrasbakeshop.com), two-time winner of The Food Network's "Cupcake Wars" and author of a just-released recipe book, "Sweet Cravings: 50 Seductive Desserts for a Gluten-Free Lifestyle" (Ten Speed Press; Random House, Inc.)

"About 2 million Americans have celiac disease – an auto-immune reaction to gluten, the protein in wheat," says Bussanich, whose painful symptoms became life-threatening before she was finally diagnosed with the illness. "Most of those people aren't diagnosed though, because the symptoms look like so many other intestinal ailments."

People with celiac disease must completely avoid gluten, which is also in rye, and barley, to avoid a case of painful and gut-damaging indigestion. But, as Harvard Medical School reported earlier this year, avoiding gluten also appears to help people with less serious digestive issues.

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“It really does seem to provide some improvement in gastrointestinal problems for a segment of the population,” says Harvard assistant professor Dr. Daniel Leffler.

For Bussanich, a chef, there was no choice: One speck of gluten would make her ill. But she refused to give up pastries, cakes and other treats, so she perfected gluten-free varieties. Her award-winning desserts left their flour-based competition in crumbs on “Cupcakes Wars” in 2011 and 2012, and she was a runner-up on the show’s “Cupcake Champion.”

Bussanich offers these tips for whipping up gluten-free baked goods this holiday season:

• **If you’re following a recipe, don’t substitute the listed flour or starch with another type unless you’re familiar with its properties.** There are many different types of gluten-free flours and starches, including millet, sorghum and sweet white rice flour, and potato and tapioca starches. Each has its own idiosyncrasies. For example, millet flour has a slightly nutty flavor and is well-suited for goods with a hearty texture. Sweet white rice flour holds moisture well and is good for recipes that have a slight gumminess to them. Potato starch is light and good for fluffy cakes.

• **Use eggs and butter at room temperature.** Eggs are often used as a binder, the protein that substitutes for the missing gluten. Eggs and butter are both easier to work with when used at room temperature, and room-temperature egg whites whip up fluffier. If you forget to pull the butter out of the refrigerator beforehand, heat it for 7 to 12 seconds in the microwave. Put cold eggs in warm (not hot) water for 30 to 60 seconds.

• **Don’t overwork batter and dough with xanthan gum in it.** Corn-based xanthan gum is often used as a stabilizer and thickener in gluten-free baked goods, sauces, dressings and soups. Once this ingredient is added, overworking the dough can give it a slimy, gummy texture, and cause it to lose flavor. (A good substitute for xanthan gum is ground psyllium seed husk.)

• **Heat higher, cream longer for lighter cakes.** One complaint people sometimes have about gluten-free baked goods is that they’re too dense. To prevent this, try setting the oven temperature 25 degrees warmer than you would for flour. This will cause the butter in the

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recipe to release its water as steam, which helps the cake rise quickly. Also, cream eggs and butter together longer – about 10 minutes – than you would for flour cakes.

Try some gluten-free desserts and maybe your holidays will be indigestion-free this year, Bussanich says.

“If your recipe doesn’t turn out wonderfully the first time, don’t give up,” she says. “I promise you, anyone can make delicious gluten-free desserts. It just may take a little practice.”

About Kyra Bussanich

Kyra Bussanich is a two-time winner of The Food Network’s hit show, “Cupcake Wars.” She graduated with honors from Le Cordon Bleu and opened her award-winning bakery, Kyra's Bake Shop, which features gourmet, gluten-free sweets. She has branched beyond desserts to other gluten-free goods in order to help those with celiac and other autoimmune diseases enjoy quality treats