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Gluten-Free Desserts

Our writer's search for delicious cookies, cakes and brownies for her gluten-sensitive mother became a family affair

By **Kristin Vukovic**

I was first introduced to the term “gluten-free” (GF) by my mother, who discovered she had a gluten sensitivity a few years ago. Plagued by a variety of gastrointestinal ailments, she got tested and was advised to try a gluten-free diet, eliminating wheat, rye and barley. Her symptoms nearly disappeared, for which she was grateful. But she was devastated by the thought of having to give up cakes, cookies and crepes for life.

As a result of my mother's new diet, I've tasted more than a few cardboard cookies and chalky cakes. But with help from experts, I discovered

a variety of delicious gluten-free dessert alternatives for the holidays that will make everyone's mouth water—including the gluten-eaters.

Many people are confused by the term “gluten-free.” Maybe they've heard of celiac disease (CD), but there is a spectrum of gluten allergies. “We're calling these ‘gluten-related disorders,’” says Dr. Peter H.R. Green, director of The Celiac Disease Center at Columbia University and co-author of *Celiac Disease: A Hidden Epidemic*. “A wheat allergy is straightforward—people develop itching, hives or anaphylaxis when they ingest wheat. Gluten sensitivity is usually →



Gluten-Free Black Bean Brownies

By Michele Licata of Olives and Pearls Creative Organic Foods (olivesandpearls.com)



- 1 can organic black beans, rinsed and drained
- 2/3 cup unsalted organic butter, melted
- 5 oz good dark chocolate, melted
- 1 cup palm sugar (available at a co-op or Whole Foods)
- 4t good vanilla
- 3 organic eggs
- 1/4 cup brown rice flour
- 1/2 cup ground almond flour
- 1/4t baking soda
- 1/4 cup good cocoa powder (my fav is Penzy's high fat cocoa)
- 1/4t sea salt
- 1/2t almond extract
- 1 cup dark, gluten-free chocolate chips (opt.)

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9x13 baking pan.
2. Melt butter and chocolate together until just barely melted. Whisk to combine.
3. Place black beans, eggs, melted butter and chocolate, cocoa powder, salt, extracts, and palm sugar in the bowl of a food processor and process until smooth.
4. Scrape into a medium bowl and fold in the flours, baking soda and chocolate chips.
5. Transfer mixture to the prepared pan and bake for 30 minutes, checking before time is up. The center should be just set. Cool before cutting into squares.

“Gluten sensitivity is a condition that is usually self-diagnosed—people discover that, by reducing gluten intake, they eliminate a whole spectrum of symptoms.”

self-diagnosed. People discover that, by reducing gluten intake, they eliminate a spectrum of symptoms,” he says. “Celiac disease is an auto-immune condition in which people develop an inflammatory response in the intestines and create antibodies.”

Recent studies revealed that one in every 100 people suffers from CD. The diagnosis rests upon blood tests and biopsies, which are interpreted by experts. “A normal intestine is like a shag carpet, with finger-like villi that aid in digestion,” says Dr. Green. “Celiacs have a flat carpet—the villi shrivel up and the small intestine atrophies.”

Jennifer Wells, a partner in Tu-Lu’s Gluten-Free Bakery in Manhattan, was diagnosed with CD a few years ago. “I felt sluggish and exhausted after eating certain foods,” says Wells.

Following her diagnosis, Wells took cooking classes in 2011, where she met her partner, Tully Lewis, a celiac who had opened Tu-Lu’s Gluten-Free Bakery in Manhattan in 2010. It was perfect timing: soon after their meeting, Lewis’ husband got a job offer in Dallas, where she opened another Tu-Lu’s location. Wells took over managing the East Village store in New York City.

“I wanted to enrich people’s lives and help them find options,” Wells says. “The best is when a celiac kid comes through the door and says, ‘You mean I can eat everything here?’ We’re proud to say, ‘Yes, everything is gluten-free.’”

Tu-Lu’s, the only 100 percent dedicated gluten-free bakery in Manhattan, offers ev-

erything from panini to dessert. Customer favorites include pecan pie, pumpkin loaf, gingerbread cookies, and Mallomar-inspired cookies made with homemade graham crackers and marshmallows covered in a chocolate glaze. Tu-Lu’s has garnered a loyal following, and continues to attract new customers with tasty and innovative culinary concoctions.

Speaking of concoctions—who would ever think to put black beans in brownies? Michele Licata, a Minnesota-based organic and whole foods chef and caterer, devised the recipe after many failed attempts to make gluten-free brownies that were just as good as the ones she had to give up. After her second stroke, Licata made a dramatic lifestyle change that included a gluten-free diet and resulted in a 100-pound weight loss and a new life philosophy.

“The inspiration for the black bean brownie recipe came from searching the web for gluten-free brownies,” Licata said. “I found one and tried it—it was just OK, nothing special. I worked on my recipe for months, trying to come up with one that was deeply chocolatey, rich, and delicious. I wanted it to stand up to any yummy brownie recipe.”

After trying it in one of Michele’s cooking classes, I can vouch that the recipe stands up to any beloved brownie recipe. Your guests won’t believe they’re gluten-free—and made with beans!

Above: Tu-Lu’s coffee cake, a bakery favorite; Tully Lewis and Jennifer Wells, owners of Tu-Lu’s Gluten-Free Bakery in Dallas and Manhattan