

Gluten-Free living



Holidays hit the stage

By Amy Ratner

There's no denying that holiday meals are big productions, with traditional foods playing the starring role.

If this is your first year approaching the Thanksgiving, Christmas or Hanukkah table as a gluten-free diner, you might be a bit intimidated. But you will quickly learn what those who are celebrating their second or fifth, or tenth or twentieth gluten-free holiday already know.

Traditional entrees can be prepared in gluten-free versions. New gluten-free recipes often add interest and flavor to the holiday menu. And, perhaps most importantly, food is only part of all the celebrating that goes on in November and December.

Center Stage

Turkey, stuffing, gravy

The Thanksgiving turkey, the Christmas ham and the Hanukkah brisket steal the holiday dinner spotlight every year. The good news is that each can easily be prepared gluten free.

Plain turkey is always gluten free. But the seasoning that sometimes comes with the turkey can contain gluten. Either the label on the turkey or the seasoning packet will tell you if any gluten-containing ingredient is included.

Some turkeys are labeled "gluten free."

The big problem with turkey is stuffing and gravy. The easy solution is to make sure yours are gluten free. You can try anything from cornbread apple and cranberry stuffing (glutenfreegoddess.blogspot.com) to wild rice stuffing (glutenfreeda.com). It's easy to thicken gravy with corn starch or arrowroot.

Things are more complicated if you are eating at someone else's home. If you are close enough to be included in a holiday dinner, consider yourself close enough to talk to your host about your gluten-free diet.

If your host uses bread made from wheat for the stuffing but bakes it outside the bird, you will be fine. Unfortunately, once the turkey is stuffed with gluten-containing bread, it's off limits to you.

If that's the case, you could contribute a gluten-free turkey breast to the holiday table. Or you can fill your plate with gluten-free side dishes.

Ham

Plain ham is also gluten free, as are a number of honey baked and glazed hams. The national chain Honey Baked Ham says all its meat products are gluten free. Heavenly Ham has removed the wheat starch from the spice in its glaze, but you have to check with your local franchise to make sure they are using the new gluten-free

product. With other hams, you have to read the label. Any gluten-containing ingredient should be listed. Some companies label their hams gluten free.

Brisket

Hanukkah recipes for beef brisket often call for flour, which thickens the gravy as the brisket slowly cooks. But there are a variety of recipes that use cornstarch or potato starch instead. You can try Zinfandel braised beef brisket (ourkitchensink.wordpress.com), Hanukkah beef brisket (cd-kitchen.com), and Tender beef brisket with onion or Beef brisket (recipes.epicurean.com). Just remember if you are guest at Hanukkah dinner, you will have to check with your host before heaping your plate with brisket.

In the Wings

Although side dishes often take second billing, we usually have strong emotional attachments to these traditional players in our holiday meals. We strongly associate Thanksgiving with sweet potatoes, Christmas with green bean casserole, and Hanukkah with latkes. All these dishes can be made gluten free. When you start looking, you will be surprised how many recipes for sides dishes in mainstream cooking magazines are already gluten free.



Sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes can be mashed, baked or boiled, or you can cook them, then slice and top them with a simple lemon glaze. Sweet potatoes mixed with brown sugar, cinnamon, and butter and topped with marshmallows are also gluten free.

Almost every recipe for mashed potatoes is gluten free, including updated versions that call for a touch of buttermilk, sour cream or heavy cream. Rarely, mashed potatoes will include flour, so you might want to ask your host about this outside possibility.

Green bean casserole

The classic green bean casserole includes concentrated cream of mushroom soup and breaded onion rings, both of which contain wheat.

But a number of gluten-free cooks have come up with alternatives. Their recipes usually involve more work than just opening the soup and onion cans because gluten-free versions of these two ingredients items are usually made from scratch. (www.glutenfreemommy.com has as close a replica of the classic recipe as we could find.)

Another alternative is to use one of the gluten-free cream of mushroom soups -- Health Valley, Progresso or Imagine brands. Since none of these is a concentrate, you have to thicken the soup with gluten-free flour or cornstarch or your casserole will be

runny. You can mix bacon into the casserole for the crunch usually provided by the onion rings and top the dish with crushed potato sticks or tortilla chips.

Some recipes that update the classic green bean casserole call for mushrooms and cream or goat cheese instead of the mushroom soup mix. (www.grouprecipes.com has both a Gluten-Free green bean casserole recipe like this and New Age green bean casserole that can be made gluten-free simply by using gluten-free bread crumbs.)

Nearly naked vegetables

Green beans also make a great side dish when they are prepared in a more "naked" fashion. Many mainstream recipes call for tossing steamed or slightly boiled beans with butter or olive oil, garlic and spices. Pine nuts also add a nice touch of flavor.

In general, mainstream cooking magazines are featuring simpler, straightforward ways to serve vegetable side dishes. The added bonus is they are often gluten free.

You can glaze carrots with maple syrup or roast Brussels sprouts with olive oil and garlic. (www.bhg.com/recipes has two interesting and gluten-free ways to prepare Brussels sprouts, Creamy Brussels sprouts and Rosemary roasted vegetables, a combination of green beans and Brussels sprouts).

Latkes

It is highly likely your Hanukkah dinner host will use wheat flour to make latkes -- the fried potato pancakes that are a special part of Hanukkah. If so, you have to pass, but it is easy to substitute gluten-free flour or cornstarch. (glutenfreegodess.blogspot.com and glutenfreebay.blogspot.com each



have a gluten-free latke recipe) Some cooks simply skip the flour altogether and let eggs do all the work of holding the latkes together.

Both applesauce and powdered sugar used to sweeten the latkes are gluten free.

After the show

Many holiday desserts are gluten free or can be made gluten free.

Pumpkin pie

The filling in a pumpkin pie is usually gluten free but unless you find a specialty gluten-free pie, you know the crust was made with wheat flour. You will be surprised how easy it can be to work with the gluten-free pie crusts on the market. For a quick lesson, go to our home page, click on the blog and check out the post titled Semi-Homemade. It might just inspire you to make a pie or two of your own. If you don't want to "do dough" or buy a pre-made gluten-free pie crust, you can make a pie crust from crushed gluten-free cookies.

Cheesecake can be made with crushed gluten-free cookie crust. Most cheesecake fillings are gluten free.

Cookies, cake and candy

Christmas always brings cookies, another baking challenge that has

gotten easier in the past few years. You can use sugar cookie, chocolate chip and brownie mixes as the base for many recipes. Add special frosting and decorations and you will have holiday treats to rival any made with wheat flour.

If your family longs for peanut butter kiss cookies, you can make them using a flourless peanut butter cookie recipe. (Mix one cup peanut butter, one cup sugar and two eggs and roll into a ball. Roll the ball in sugar, bake at 350 for 10 minutes. Take out of the oven, cool for one minute and top with an unwrapped Hershey chocolate kiss.) What could be easier?

There are so many new gluten-free cookbooks and cooking web sites, we can't keep up with them. You will find many cookie recipes that are as easy to make as those that contain gluten. (glutenfree.wordpress.com has a recipe for Christmas roll out cookies.)

If cake is your dessert of choice, there are numerous gluten-free cake mixes, some of which you will find right on your supermarket shelf. And don't forget flourless tortes. (Several recipes are available at www.ochef.com and www.foodnetwork.com has a recipe for Chocolate almond flourless torte).

Hanukkah jelly donuts

Sufganiyot is a traditional Hanukkah dessert. Usually these fried jelly donuts are made with wheat flour, but there are gluten-free recipes at glutenfreebay.blogspot.com and www.jewishfood-list.com. Hanukkah gelt, candy coins given to children, is usually made from plain chocolate and is gluten free.

Beverages

All distilled liquors, wine (though not wine coolers which usually contain

malt), and champagne are gluten free.

Mulled cider, flavored hot chocolate (as long as it does not contain malt flavoring) and tea (flavored teas can contain malt flavoring so make sure you read the label) are gluten free.

If you are out shopping and want a warm drink, Starbucks hot chocolate, gingerbread and peppermint lattes are gluten free, but a customer service representative said the eggnog latte may contain gluten. vanilla, double chocolate chip and java chip Frappuccinos contain either vanilla bean powder or java chips that could be cross contaminated.

Overall Starbucks advises gluten-free customers to ask that the pitcher used to make their drinks be run through a sanitizer to prevent cross contamination.

You can also make a quick stop at Dunkin Donuts, where none of the hot drinks, including the pumpkin spice and gingerbread lattes, list any gluten free containing ingredients.

What the holidays are really about

After all these words about food and drink, it might seem odd for us to say that the holidays are not really about how much you can put on your plate.

Everywhere you turn these days there are stories about how the economy may force us to cut back on material gifts. A bit of joy seems mixed in with all the apprehension – a ribbon of hope that we might be able to get back to original intention of the holidays.

What should our intentions be? To gather family and friends and let them know how much we need them, how much we love them. But even if the presents we give shrink or disappear, we expect to salvage and share the traditional meal.

Does it really matter if everything is gluten free?

What really matters is the chance to hold wiggly grandchildren on your lap, catch up with sons and daughters home from college, nieces and nephews you rarely see, brothers and sisters whose lives are as busy as your own, and neighbors who you often just wave to in passing.

We hope you enjoy all the most wonderful aspects of the holiday season.

Gift-Worthy Gluten-Free Cookies



By Jacqueline Mallorca



Here are some gluten-free cookies you can make ahead and freeze. To give them as gifts choose a container and wrap different kinds of cookies separately in plastic wrap (so they don't make each other soft, or transfer flavors). Wrap the whole thing in cellophane with the excess fanned out on top, and tie with a ribbon. For a final touch, attach a shiny new tin cookie cutter along with the gift tag.



Rice Flour Gingerbread Cookies

Makes 24, approximately 2 1/2 by 3 1/2 inches

1 cup brown rice flour, plus extra for rolling cookies

1 cup cornstarch or potato starch

1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt

1/4 teaspoon xanthan gum

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon powdered ginger

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

1/2 cup dark molasses

1/4 cup sugar

3 tablespoons unsalted butter



Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper. (If using only 1 baking sheet, cool under running water and dry before re-using, as it must be cold.)

Mix the rice flour and cornstarch with the salt, xanthan gum, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves.

Heat the molasses to the boiling point in a saucepan over medium heat, and stir in the sugar and butter. Remove from the heat. Stir in the flour mixture one third at a time, and if needed, 1 to 2 tablespoons water, to make a workable dough. Turn out onto a lightly rice-floured surface and knead a few times, until silky smooth. Cut the ball of dough in half and work with one section at a time.

Dusting the dough lightly with rice flour, roll out 1/4 inch thick. Using a rice-floured cookie cutter, cut out as many gingerbread figures as possible, re-rolling the trimmings to make more. (It's easiest to lift away the excess dough from around the cookies, and then transfer them to

the baking sheet on a metal spatula.) Bake until the cookies puff up slightly and lighten to a tan color, 6 to 7 minutes. Let cool on the baking sheet for 5 minutes, then place on a wire rack. Repeat with the remaining dough. If decorating with frosting, let the cookies cool completely first.



Pecan-Currant Cookies

Makes about 40

1 Earl Grey tea bag

1 cup dried Zante currants

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cold, cut in small cubes

1/2 cup sugar

1 large egg

1 large egg yolk

1/4 teaspoon lemon extract

1 1/4 cups white rice flour

1/4 cup cornstarch or potato starch

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 1/2 cups pecans, finely chopped

Preheat the oven to 375° F. Line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper.

Cover the tea bag with 2 cups boiling water, add the currants, and let stand for 2 minutes. Discard the tea bag, and drain well.

Combine the butter and sugar in a food processor and mix to a cream. Add the whole egg, egg yolk and lemon extract, and blend well. Add the rice flour, cornstarch and baking powder, and process just long enough to make a soft dough. Sprinkle the currants on top, and pulse on and off very briefly to blend.

Spread the chopped pecans on a plate. Using a teaspoon, scoop out

heaped balls of dough and dislodge with a second teaspoon onto the nuts. Work with about 6 cookies at a time. Roll the dough lightly in the nuts to form a ball and coat them completely. Transfer to the baking sheets, spacing them 2 inches apart. (Refrigerate second baking sheet while first one is in the oven.)

Bake until the cookies have spread out and browned lightly, about 12 minutes. Let cool on a wire rack. Store airtight.



Hazelnut Horns

Makes about 30

3/4 cup (3 ounces) hazelnuts

1/3 cup sugar

3/4 cup white rice flour

1/2 cup cornstarch or potato starch

1/4 teaspoon xanthan gum

Pinch fine sea salt

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cold, cut up

1 large egg yolk

2 1/2 ounces 60% to 70% dark chocolate, melted and cooled to lukewarm

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper.

Combine the hazelnuts and sugar in a food processor and grind to a fine meal. Add the rice flour, cornstarch, and salt, and process to mix. Add the butter and process to mix; then add the egg yolk and pulse on and off to form a crumbly dough.

Turn the dough out, crumbs and all, onto a work surface. Gather it all together and knead lightly to combine.



Divide the dough into 3 portions, and shape each one into a 6-inch log. Line up the logs and cut across into 10 equal slices, forming 30 pieces. Roll each piece into a 3-inch tapered log. Place on the baking sheets 2 inches apart and bend the ends inwards to make a half moon shape. Chill for 15 minutes.

Bake, one baking sheet at a time, until the cookies are pale gold, 12 to 15 minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes, then transfer to a rack to cool.

Using a small rubber spatula, spread a little chocolate on both tips of each cookie. (Top side only.) Return to the rack and let set, or chill in the refrigerator.



Chocolate-Pine Nut Meringues*

Makes about 20

4 ounces 60% to 70% dark chocolate, melted and cooled to lukewarm
2 large egg whites
1/2 cup sugar
Pinch fine sea salt
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
2/3 cup (3 ounces) pine nuts

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.

Beat the egg whites until they start to hold their shape, then beat in the sugar a little at a time. Continue beating until the meringue holds stiff, unwavering peaks, about 2 minutes. Beat in the salt and vanilla. Fold in the pine nuts, and then the chocolate. (It's fine to leave swirls.) Drop by



teaspoonfuls onto the baking sheet, 1 inch apart. Bake until puffed up and crisp, about 10 minutes. Leave on the baking sheet for 5 minutes to firm up slightly. Let cool on a wire rack.



Teff Gingerbread-Date Bars *

The flavor and texture of this dense and sticky gingerbread is irresistible. Adding dates is probably gilding the lily, but they make a good thing even better.

Makes about 10 bars

3/4 cup + 1 teaspoon teff flour
1/3 cup brown rice flour
1/4 cup cornstarch
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon xanthan gum
Pinch fine sea salt
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, softened
1/2 cup sugar
1 large egg
1/2 cup dark molasses
4 Medjool dates, pitted and chopped
Confectioners' sugar

Heat the oven to 350°F. Line an 8-inch square cake pan with parchment

paper. Combine 3/4 cup teff flour with the rice flour, cornstarch, baking soda, baking powder, salt, xanthan gum, cloves, cinnamon, and ginger, and set aside.

In a separate bowl, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy, then

beat in the egg. Add the molasses and 1/2 cup hot water, and beat until smooth, about 30 seconds. Beat in the flour mixture. Toss the chopped dates with the remaining teaspoon of teff flour, to prevent them from sticking together, and stir into the batter. Transfer the batter to the prepared pan. Bake until firm and an inserted toothpick come out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cool completely in the pan before turning out. Dust with confectioners' sugar. Cut in half, and then cut each half into 4 or 5 bars.

© copyright Jacqueline Mallorca 2007.

* From *The Wheat-Free Cook: Gluten-Free Recipes for Everyone* (Wm. Morrow), available at bookstores nationwide, Williams-Sonoma, and Amazon.com. Used with permission.

