

CRAVE | GOING GLUTEN-FREE

Going Gluten-Free: Mix and match to create right flour for baking

By [Joleen Oshiro](#) • Dec. 4, 2018

The world of gluten-free flours is vast — should you use an almond flour or a rice flour; white rice or brown? — and navigating options and techniques for using them can be overwhelming. So a few local bakers and producers of locally sourced flours offer tips for successfully turning out gluten-free baked goods.

RECOMMENDED FLOURS

Since nonwheat flours all have different characteristics, baking gluten-free can mean mixing flours to achieve a specific end product — and that means becoming familiar with each flour, not an easy task. “It’s always a chemistry experiment,” said pastry chef Kate Wagner.”

Thankfully, gluten-free flour mixes eliminate that aspect for home bakers, so that a gluten-free baking project isn’t much more work than a conventional one.

Even commercial bakers rely on mixes, because they enable delivery of a consistent product. Non deMello, lead baker at Down to Earth stores, said mixes are vital to consistency when different bakers at different stores are making the same item.

Most mixes that Wagner and deMello discuss below are available at local supermarkets and natural food stores, but call ahead. Find the King Arthur mix at Times Supermarket near Kahala Mall, 1173 21st St., or buy online at kingarthurfLOUR.com.

Recommended for general baking are King Arthur Gluten-Free All-Purpose Flour (intended for gluten-free recipes), King Arthur Gluten-Free Measure for Measure Flour (find this one online; it can be used with conventional recipes), Bob’s Red Mill Gluten Free 1-to-1 Baking Flour (can be used with conventional recipes).

When gluten is not the only dietary restriction you must consider, read labels to ensure the ingredients and flours can be tolerated.

To avoid xanthan gum, consider Bob’s Red Mill Gluten Free All Purpose Baking Flour, a unique, hearty flour that includes garbanzo and fava bean flours, tapioca and sorghum flours, and potato starch. But Wagner warns that some gluten-free eaters can’t tolerate garbanzo flour, so in that case, look for King Arthur Gluten-Free All-Purpose Flour.

To make up for the absence of xanthan gum, which provides structure and texture, Wagner recommends adding an extra 1/2 teaspoon baking powder to the recipe, or folding in whipped egg whites or egg-white substitute.

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Canoe plant flours from kalo (taro) and ulu (breadfruit) are in a category all their own because they offer fiber and protein in addition to their function as a flour, said Brynn Foster, owner of Voyaging Foods, which produces those flours, as well as dry mixes for baked goods. Find Foster's ulu flour and kalo powder, which use Hawaiian varieties of breadfruit and taro, at the Waiwai Collective, 1110 University Ave.; the kalo powder is at Whole Foods Market as well. Visit voyagingfoods.com.

Colin Kumabe, director of operations for Touch a Heart, grinds his own ulu to a powderlike consistency and remills purchased kalo flour into powder. The reason? Ulu and kalo are heavy with fiber, so their flours need to be extra fine for making breads and cakes. Touch a Heart, which provides food-service job-training, sells ulu (\$3.95) and kiawe flours (\$4.50) by the quarter-pound, as well as wheat-free baked products. Call 779-7083, email info@touchahearthawaii.org or visit bakershearhawaii.org and touchahearthawaii.org.

At 'Ai Pohaku, the name of the game is kiawe flour, made from the pods and seeds of the kiawe plant. Founder Vince Dodge said one of the virtues of the flour, labeled Waianae Gold, is that it is digested slowly, making it a low-glycemic food that provides lasting energy and is diabetic friendly. Waianae Gold also produces value-added bars. Visit waianaegold.com for a list of stores that carry the products.

Here are tips from Foster, Kumabe and Dodge, along with fresh ideas from baker Jennifer Hee of Juicy Brew:

>> Because of their starch and fiber, kalo and ulu flours are dense and must be mixed with other flours — use 20 percent ulu or kalo. Almond and oat flours make for a good mix, said Foster, or use King Arthur Measure for Measure, Bob's Red Mill 1-to-1 or Cup4Cup brand flours.

>> Foster said that while most gluten-free flours are tasteless, taro powder enhances flavors. "It has a nuttiness about it, and there's no need of much sweetener."

>> Use taro powder as a replacement thickener for cornstarch and tapioca. "It's got 10 times more fiber than cornstarch, two times more than wheat, so it's healthy for everyone," Foster said.

>> Ulu has a subtle flavor and floral scent, said Kumabe. Its flavor is neutral enough that it is adaptable to different recipes.

>> Hee said because kalo and ulu flours are expensive, she adds the actual ingredient straight into a recipe. "It works pretty well. I steam it and blend it with liquid." For instance, she uses steamed ulu in a gluten-free cinnamon roll — "It has a nice texture," she said. Hee does the same with cassava and said it makes for an "extra gooey" mochi.

"I don't have recipes using these local ingredients. You can't overmix these things so I keep adding and mixing until I seem to have a good batter that will bake nicely."

>> Kiawe flour is 45 percent fructose and sucrose — sugar — so Kumabe said it works in a crunchy cookie. It lends an earthy, smoky, caramely flavor. Like canoe-plant flours, kiawe must be mixed with other flours — use 35 percent kiawe, said Dodge, and reduce added sweeteners. According to Waianae Gold, kiawe flour is good added to oatmeal, pancakes, cakes, mochi, bread pudding, breaded fish and more.

TECHNIQUES

>> From deMello: In place of a graham-cracker crust, find a gluten-free boxed cereal and crush it to make a crust.

>> From Hee: Replace other thickeners and binders with gluten-free flour. Hee uses cassava flour, for instance, as a binder in veggie burgers.

>> From Wagner: Newbies would do best to start with simple projects using mixes for specific items such as pizza dough, pancakes, biscuits, cake, cookies and pie shells. Brands such as Betty Crocker, Pillsbury and King Arthur Flour have gluten-free mixes requiring just a few additional ingredients. If you want to try a singular gluten-free flour, rice flour is relatively friendly — use it to make a basic cookie.

>> Sift! A key to success with all gluten-free products is multiple siftings. Wagner sifts her flours four to five times. “Each time you sift, you’re lightening up the whole mixture.”

>> Do not overwork dough or overmix batter. It will get heavier and denser. Just incorporate to blend.

>> Turning a conventional recipe gluten-free is an opportunity to learn about ingredients and how they’re best utilized. It’s a gradual process: Wagner starts by replacing half the wheat flour with a gluten-free flour, then tinkering with the recipe to achieve the proper texture and flavor. (She also replaces refined sugar with various unrefined raw sugars.) Next she’ll reduce the wheat flour (and processed sugar) to 25 percent and tinker again. The last step is to totally eliminate the gluten (and processed sugar) from the recipe.

The conversion takes time, but she said it will make you a better gluten-free baker: “If you don’t go through the process, you won’t know why something works or doesn’t work. It takes trial and error, time and practice. Don’t expect success immediately, and don’t be afraid to experiment. It’s fun.”

Finally, Wagner said she’s willing to offer her help to anyone who needs advice. Reach her at notjustdessertshi@gmail.com. Visit notjustdessertscafe.com.

“Going Gluten-Free” helps meet the cooking and dining challenges faced by those on wheat-free diets. It runs on the first Wednesday of each month. Send questions and suggestions to Joleen Oshiro, joshiro@staradvertiser.com.

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