

CRAVE | GOING GLUTEN-FREE

Going Gluten-Free: Chef Kate Wagner has your interests at heart

By [Joleen Oshiro](#) · March 3, 2020

Those of us eating gluten-free 10 years ago thought we'd seen the last of soft, springy breads and delicate pastries and cakes. Our only options for a simple sandwich were breads that crumbled under the weight of a few slices of meat, and desserts inundated with sugar to compensate for their dry, sometimes cardboardy texture.

Things have come a long way since then, and that's due in large part to chefs like Kate Wagner, who's committed herself to cooking and baking for folks on restricted diets. Wagner shows her chops through savory dishes that run the gamut from Japanese to American to Italian cuisine. Her gluten-free baked goods stand up to any conventional version, even as she uses alternative sugars and dairy substitutes.

In January, the Hawaii chef released her first cookbook, "Recipes From an Unconventional Chef," a compilation of adaptable recipes that cover everything from pupu to desserts. There are even sauces and a salad dressing.

The genius of this book is in the flexibility of the recipes. Because Wagner cooks and bakes with an eye toward healthfulness, the recipes reflect alternative flours and sugars, and she regularly reminds readers that they can swap in egg substitute and nondairy cheeses for the real thing.

She even offers variations for meat eaters. But even without meat, her recipes are as rich and decadent as those in any conventional cookbook, allowing readers to make their own choices about the ingredients they use and the kinds of dishes they create.

Wagner starts with sections on quinoa and polenta, each the basis for a list of recipes. Both are go-to alternatives for nonwheat diets; quinoa is even a healthful, protein-packed alternative to grains such as rice. Wagner offers polenta preparations that play with its texture, using sauce, cheese and more for scoopable dishes, including a banana pudding, and she employs skillet to deliver firm, sliceable, even crisp cakes.

A potato section features an ambitious recipe for gnocchi, a quicker Potato Leek Soup, versatile Hash Brown Waffles and more.

Entrees include Kate's Mac & Cheese, Four-Bean Stew and Sun-Dried Tomato Cheesecake With Goat Cheese — diversity reigns.

The largest section by far is desserts, and sweet treats are perhaps what Wagner is most famous for around town. The recipes there range from the simplest of the simple (Corn Cereal Pie Crust, Yogurt Pops) to projects that require some time and experience (Chai Pound Cake, Flourless Chocolate Cake).

Whatever your dietary restrictions, Wagner said her goal with the book was to create dishes people will eat because they want to, not have to. "If the food tastes good, people can make lifetime changes," she said.

Wagner said she is available to lend advice to folks trying out the recipes. "I want it to be an interactive thing," she said.

“They’re not just buying a book. I want to make it easy for them.”

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The bread pudding above, a family recipe Wagner grew up on, is near and dear to her heart. The chef adapted the original to accommodate diabetics and dairy- and gluten-free eaters, calling for coconut palm sugar rather than processed white cane sugar; coconut milk to replace dairy milk; and gluten-free bread. The beauty of the recipe, she said, is its endless variations (a few of them follow her recipe).

This dessert was so easy to make, even a novice baker like me could execute it, even though the pudding at the center of my pan was so moist I could only scoop it, not slice it. (It was cooked, though.) Wagner’s easy fix: Return it to the oven for 10 to 15 minutes. She added that, for a drier bread pudding, it’s fine to cut back the coconut milk by as much as an entire can.

To purchase “Recipes from an Unconventional Chef,” go to Wagner’s website, chefkatepresents.com, or try online retailers like amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com or liferich.com. Contact Wagner via email at chefkatepresents@gmail.com.

“RECIPES FROM AN UNCONVENTIONAL CHEF”

By Kate Wagner (2020, LifeRich Publishing, \$30.99)

Haupia (Coconut) Bread Pudding

1 fresh loaf gluten-free bread (use loaf that’s light and fluffy, free of seeds; or use sweet bread)

3 (14-ounce) cans coconut milk or cream

1 cup coconut palm sugar or sugar substitute

3 large eggs or egg substitute

1 cup unsweetened grated coconut, divided

1-1/2 teaspoons coconut extract (optional)

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Break up bread by hand into large chunks (approximately 2 inches) and spread in 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Set aside.

In large bowl, whisk coconut milk, sugar and eggs. Add half of grated coconut and extract, if using, and whisk again.

Pour slowly over bread. Incorporate well, until all the bread is wet. Sprinkle remaining coconut on top.

Bake 45 minutes to 1 hour, until golden and puffy. When done, center will still be jiggly, but a toothpick inserted will come out clean.

Cool 1 hour. Serve topped with whipped cream, pureed pineapple or sweetened coconut cream. Serves 8 to 12.

VARIATIONS:

>> Add chocolate chips or macadamia nuts.

>> Make an almond bread pudding by replacing the coconut milk with almond milk, the coconut extract with almond extract and top with slivered almonds.

>> Make a chocolate bread pudding with an addition of 1/2 cup cocoa (baking time will shorten).

>> Add 1 cup fresh mango or fresh pineapple (drained of liquid) and use 2 cans coconut milk instead of 3.

Nutritional information unavailable.

“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 to Joleen Oshiro, joshiro@staradvertiser.com.

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