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16 Gluten-Free Flours (and the Best Times to Use Them)

by DAWN REISS | PUBLISHED: YESTERDAY



Credit: [Christine Gallary](#)

Following a gluten-free diet, whether it's related to health, food allergies, or any other reason, can feel overwhelming if you're just starting out. Even though the gluten-free market has come a long way, there's still a lot to learn if you're trying to make the switch.

We spoke with Kathlena Rails aka "The Allergy Chef," who owns the [Free and Friendly Foods bakery](#) in San Bruno, California, to get some tips on wheat flour alternatives. Rails, who has to wear a full-face respirator to protect herself against airborne food allergens, certainly knows her way around gluten-free cooking and baking.

Learn the labels.

She first says to start learning the lingo and studying gluten-free labels. Gluten refers to the protein found in wheat (which includes durum, semolina, spelt, and farro), rye, barley, and triticale — a cross between wheat and rye.

It's important to understand that just because something is labeled gluten-free doesn't mean it's free of all gluten, Rails says. Foods can still have trace amounts, especially if something is made on shared equipment. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allows products labeled "gluten-free" to have up to 20 parts per million of gluten. Products labeled "certified gluten-free" must have less than 10 parts per million. This can be problematic — especially to those who are severely celiac.

Oats, for example, don't typically contain gluten, but there can be cross-contamination if they are processed in facilities that also handle wheat, barley, or rye. As a result, my son has had red blotches appear on his face when we fed him oats that weren't certified gluten-free.

Embrace variety.

Regardless of what types of baking you do, it's essential to blend multiple ingredients because there isn't a single flour that can fully replace wheat. Grain-free flours such as coconut or almond flours can taste flat and inconsistent when used alone in recipes, says [Shawna Coronado](#), author of [Stacked With Flavor](#). Instead, she recommends mixing flours and starches to create an all-purpose substitution. Blends are useful as well, because certain flours can taste gritty, starchy, or just not flavorful.

Shawna likes to make a blend that includes 3 cups of almond flour (or a seed flour if you need a tree-free option), 1 1/2 cups arrowroot or potato starch, 3/4 cup coconut flour, and 3/4 cup tapioca starch. She sifts together all the ingredients (ideally twice, to make sure everything is well-incorporated), and then stores the blend in an airtight jar.

Here are 16 other flour substitutes you can use for baking gluten-free goodies, and how they work.

- 1. Buckwheat.** Despite the name (which can scare off people), buckwheat is gluten-free and works well as a flour alternative. Lisa Richards, a nutritionist and author of [The Candida Diet](#), suggests trying it in yeast breads. Or use it in crepes, pancakes, and pound cake-type cakes, says Monica Ruiz-Noriega, Ph. D., a functional nutrition and wellness coach of San Francisco-based [Vigeo Nutrition](#).
- 2. Millet flour.** This mild, slightly nutty flour can be used in quick breads and muffin recipes. It's good for all baking, says Rails, especially pancakes and waffles. Be aware: If it's used in great quantity, it can leave a starchy taste and make baked goods coarse.
- 3. Sorghum flour.** Smoother than millet, this mild flour is closer in texture and taste to wheat flour, which makes it good for baking, but it will make recipes slightly darker in color. It can be blended with cornstarch in breads.
- 4. Amaranth flour.** This protein powerhouse is a low-carb, high-fiber option that absorbs water easily, which can make baked goods dense if not blended properly.
- 5. Black beans.** This high-fiber option is a great way to eliminate using flours in gluten-free (and usually vegan) brownies, truffles, and cookies, says Feriha Bilgen, the founder of [Celiac Simplified](#). It's best to use it with chocolate-based baked goods, which will mask the taste of black beans.
- 6. Chickpea flour.** This sturdy, dense flour, also called garbanzo bean flour, can bind well with lighter gluten-free flours. It's great for non-chocolate baked goods, Bilgen says. Try it in cookies, muffins, breads, crepes, tortillas, and flatbreads.
- 7. Coconut flour.** This highly absorbent flour can make baked goods light and fluffy. But be aware that you'll need to use less. Aim for about 1/4 to 1/3 as much coconut flour as regular flour, says Don Baiocchi, who blogs at [Paleo Gluten-Free Guy](#). Another word of caution: Coconut flour smells amazing, but falls apart on its own, so combine it with something else, says Sarah Spann, a nutritionist in Brisbane, Australia, who usually blends three parts almond meal to one part coconut flour.
- 8. Teff flour.** This high-fiber, protein-packed, gluten-free grain is high in calcium (a cup of it is similar to a half cup of spinach). It can be used in breads, crepes, cookies, cakes, and brownies.
- 9. Cassava flour.** This root vegetable (also called yucca) makes a great basic flour for blending that has lots of fiber. (It is not the same as tapioca flour). It's a carb-heavy flour that is similar to wheat, but not as grainy or gritty as other flours, which can make it a great substitute for a variety of baked goods.
- 10. Almond flour.** This low-carb, nutrient-dense flour leans on the sweeter side. If you don't have a tree-nut allergy, use this flour in recipes for pie crusts or muffins, says Ruiz-Noriega. I personally like to mix it with organic cornmeal to make homemade cornbread for my son.
- 11. Arrowroot.** Good for creating glossy glazes and thickening pie fillings, this gluten-free starch comes from the root of a tropical herb. It can replace cornstarch, but less is needed. Use two teaspoons of arrowroot to one tablespoon (three teaspoons) of cornstarch. It has no flavor, which makes it versatile for baked goods.
- 12. Potato flour.** Potato flour is usually made from the entire potato, whereas potato starch (below) is just the starch. This flour can add creamy, earthy textures to baked goods including breads and dinner rolls.
- 13. Potato starch.** The starch will help recipes bind together. Use it sparingly in quick breads, muffins, and gluten-free flour mixes: Too much of it will make baked goods crumbly. [DeFloured](#), a gluten-free bakery in Chicago, uses it in almost all of its baked goods, says Johanna Van Dorf, the baker and owner. She makes her own house flour blend using a mix of potato starch, tapioca flour, and brown rice flour.
- 14. Brown rice flour.** All rice is gluten-free. But it can also make baked goods gritty in texture if you use too much. Used in muffins, cookies, and breads, this slightly nutty flour has more nutritional value than the white rice variety.
- 15. Sweet white rice flour.** This "sticky rice" flour is mild, not super sweet, but still gluten-free and can make baked goods like a Bundt or coconut cake lighter than brown rice flour because it has a higher starch content.
- 16. Tapioca.** This is a starch (sometimes also called tapioca flour) that is extracted from cassava root. The wet pulp is squeezed to leave behind a liquid that is then dried. It can make breads and other baked goods chewier or help thicken pie fillings, but if used in too large a quantity, it will create a chalky aftertaste.

Related: [The Best Gluten-Free Flours for All Your Baking Needs](#)

One note: Many gluten-free recipes also call for xanthan gum, a common food additive used to substitute for gluten. It's a sugar-like compound (usually made from corn) that comes from fermenting sugars with bacteria. But depending on how it's derived, some people with serious food allergies or sensitivities can have issues. Make sure to check the product line before adding any variety into your gluten-free baked goods.