

Nuts to you—or maybe not

When I was growing up, peanut-butter sandwiches were as common in lunchrooms as apples. But today, most schools and day-care centers are peanut-free zones because of the hazards they pose for some children. Peanut allergies are now one of the most common causes of food-related deaths.

Ironically, peanuts are part of the legume family, along with peas and beans. Not actually nuts, peanuts don't belong in the tree-nut category, which includes cashews, almonds, pecans, walnuts, beechnuts, Brazil nuts and pistachios.

While tree-nut allergies are less common than peanut allergies, about 3.3 million people in the United States have an allergy to peanuts and or tree nuts.

Desserts and snacks are often laden with nuts, particularly walnuts. That used to mean sufferers had to forgo most treats. However, today there's a myriad of products on the market—and pastries to purchase—for kids of all ages who can't tolerate nuts.

"Sunflower-seed butter is a great substitute for peanut butter," says Cybele Pascal, who has a tree-nut allergy, as does her son, who suffers from multiple food allergies. As a matter of fact, Pascal's entire family is allergic to something, which is why she wrote "The Allergen-Free Baker's Handbook: How to Bake Without Gluten, Wheat, Dairy, Eggs, Soy, Peanuts, Tree Nuts, and Sesame."

Pascal prefers sunflower-seed butter, found in the health-food section of most supermarkets, to peanut butter for both spreading and baking. For her cookbook and Web site (www.cybelepascal.com), she did extensive research on where to locate nut-free and allergen-free products for both eating and baking, foods like chocolate bars, cocoa powder, cookies, crackers and more.

Jill Robbins started reinventing pastry recipes when, at 18-months old, her son was diagnosed with allergies. Because she wanted him to enjoy snacks and sweets, she amassed so many recipes that her efforts morphed into a cookbook, "Allergen-Free Baking: Baked Treats for All Occasions."

Today, Robbins is the founder and president of Home Free (www.homefreetreats.com), a line of organic cookies and cakes, which, like the sensational recipes in her cookbook, are free of peanuts, tree nuts, eggs and dairy products.

"My goal has been about including everyone," she says. "It means a lot to people with allergies that someone cares enough to serve foods they can eat."

It also means that they're not on the sidelines empty-handed while everyone else enjoys a nice treat.

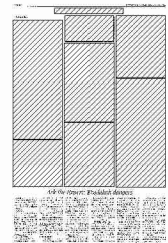
RAISINDORAS

(Pareve)

Recipe by Jill Robbins from "Allergen Free Baking." With the chewy texture of brownies (minus the chocolate), these soft square spice bars loaded with raisins are similar to Hermits, an irresistible pastry popular in Jewish homes for generations. Raisindoras are great fun to make with children. They'll love adding the baking soda and watching the ingredients foam up under their eyes.

Boiling Ingredients:

- 1 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tsp. Cinnamon



1/4 tsp. Cloves
1/4 tsp. Nutmeg
1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking soda
1/3 cup safflower oil
1/4 cup applesauce
1 cup spelt, wheat or other flour

Preparation:

Put "boiling ingredients" into a small pot. Stir and cover. Bring to boil, uncover, and reduce heat to medium/low. Gently boil for 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat.

Make sure to gather any interested children to watch the next step.

Add the baking soda, and watch the mixture immediately turn white and frothy. Stir briefly and cover.

Let sit for 2 hours.

Five minutes before the 2 hours elapses, preheat oven to 325°.

Oil and flour 8x8-inch baking pan.

Add the oil and applesauce, and stir until mixed. Add the flour and fold until just mixed.

Spread evenly in pan. Bake for 42 minutes. Let cool in pan on wire rack.

There are lots of desserts and snacks for kids of all ages who can't tolerate nuts.

Slice into squares after 5 minutes and let continue to cool in pan.

Serves 16.

Variation:

Want a tea cake instead? Just bake in a loaf pan instead, in the same amount of time.

HOME FREE BANANA BREAD

(Pareve)

Recipe by Jill Robbins from "Allergen Free Baking." You won't miss the nuts when you bite into this moist, delicious, allergy friendly banana bread. Why two loaves? One you'll devour right away. The other you can cut into slices and freeze for perfect snacks on the run.

Dry ingredients:

1 1/2 cup white spelt or wheat flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 cup whole spelt or wheat flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 1/4 cup sugar
1 tsp. xanthan gum
1/2 cup potato starch
1 Tbsp. Cinnamon
1 Tbsp. tapioca starch 1/2 tsp. salt

Wet ingredients:

2/3 cup rice milk
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
1/2 cup safflower oil
1 tsp. vanilla extract
2 tps. soy lecithin (granules or powder or warmed liquid)
1 1/2 cups tightly packed ripe banana (about 3 to 4 bananas)

Additional ingredients:

1/2 cup chopped flour-dusted dates (Hint: Chop on heavily floured cutting board for easy, nonsticky chopping and flouring)

Optional ingredients:

Substitute some or all of the dates with chocolate chips or large

raisins. We love about a tablespoon of pareve chocolate chips as an occasional surprise!

Preparation:

Pre-heat oven to 350°.

Oil two 8 1/2x4 1/2-inch bread pans.

Mix the dry ingredients and sift three times.

Put wet ingredients in blender. Blend for 15 seconds on low and 1 minute on high.

Pour the wet into the dry, and fold gently until almost mixed. Add the dates (raisins and/or chocolate chips) and fold until just mixed.

Pour batter into pans.

Bake for 50 minutes, or until breads spring to the touch, and a toothpick comes out clean. Let cool in pans on cooling rack. Slice when cool (or when someone just has to have some).

Each loaf makes 6 thick slices, or cut each slice in half for 12 half slices.

DOUBLE CHOCO-CHUNK COOKIES

(Pareve)

Reprinted with permission from "The Allergen-Free Handbook." These chewy, brownie-like cookies contain a double dose of chocolate.

Ingredients:

1 1/4 cups Basic Gluten-Free Flour Mix (recipe below)

1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder

1/2 tsp. xanthan gum

1/2 tsp. baking soda

1 tsp. cream of tartar

1/4 tsp. salt

1/3 cup canola oil

1/3 cup rice milk

2 tsps. pure vanilla extract

2/3 cup granulated sugar

1 cup Enjoy Life Rice-Milk Boom Choco-Boom bars (at enjoylifefoods.com and some Whole Foods stores), chopped into chunks, about 4 (1.4-oz.) bars or 1 cup dairy-free, soy-free chocolate chips

Preparation:

Preheat the oven to 325°.

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Combine the flour mix, cocoa powder, xanthan gum, baking soda, cream of tartar and salt. Mix thoroughly, being sure to work out any lumps of cocoa powder.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the canola oil and the rice milk, mixing on medium speed for 30 seconds.

Add the vanilla and sugar. Mix for 20 seconds.

Add the dry ingredients to the wet and mix on low speed, scraping down the sides of the bowl. Fold in the chocolate chunks.

Scoop out the dough by heaping tablespoonfuls and place on the baking sheets, 12 per sheet. Wet your hands with a little water and roll the dough into balls.

Bake in the center of the oven for 12 minutes, until just set. Do not overcook, as chocolate burns easily. You want the inside to remain chewy, not dry.

Let cookies cool for 5 minutes on the baking sheets before transferring to a cooling rack.

Makes 2 dozen, 2-inch cookies.

BASIC GLUTEN-FREE FLOUR MIX

(Pareve)

The key to the best gluten-free baked goods is Authentic Foods

superfine brown rice flour; it's the Cadillac of brown rice flours and worth its weight in gold. If you can't find it at your local natural-foods market or at Whole Foods, order it online. Both Ener-G and Bob's Red Mill brown rice flours will also work, but they won't turn out as well. I don't recommend Arrowhead Mills brown rice flour—too gritty. The brands of potato starch and tapioca flour or starch are not important; any kind will work.

Ingredients:

4 cups superfine brown rice flour
1 1/3 cups potato starch (not potato flour)
2/3 cup tapioca flour (also called tapioca starch)

Preparation:

To measure flour, use a large spoon to scoop it into the measuring cup, then level it off with the back of a knife or a straight-edge. Do not use the measuring cup itself to scoop your flour when measuring. It will compact the flour, and you will wind up with too much for the recipe.

Combine all ingredients in a gallon-size, zipper-top plastic bag. Shake until well-blended.

Store in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Makes 6 cups.

CHOCOLATE CRISPY TREATS

(Pareve)

Reprinted with permission from "The Allergen-Free Handbook." SunButter (a brand of sunflower-seed butter) is used in place of marshmallows as the binder in this allergen-free old favorite.

Ingredients:

1/2 cup dark Karo syrup
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup SunButter
3 cups rice-crispy cereal
1 cup dairy-free, soy-free chocolate chips

Preparation:

Grease an 8x8-inch pan.

Place the dark Karo syrup and sugar in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Heat, stirring frequently, until sugar dissolves and mixture just begins to boil.

Remove from heat and stir in the SunButter, mixing well.

Add the rice crispys and mix, working quickly. Press the mixture into the pan. Set aside.

Melt the chocolate chips in a microwave-safe bowl in the microwave, stirring at 30-second increments, or melt in a saucepan over low heat, stirring constantly. Spread the melted chocolate evenly over the rice-crispy mixture. Let cool.

Cut into 16 squares.

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