

Canola Oil

I generally use canola oil in my recipes because it's easy to find, healthful, and mild. See Resources, page 177, for brands that are manufactured in a peanut-free, tree nut-free facility. Alternatively, you can use rice bran oil, another light, healthful oil (again, check Resources, page 177, for “safe” brands). If you choose to use another type of vegetable oil, pick one that you know is safe for you and that has a mild flavor. I like safflower oil and sunflower oil, or you may choose to bake with extra-light olive oil.

1/3 cup canola oil = 1/2 cup butter

Dairy-Free, Soy-Free Vegetable Shortening

Organic, nonhydrogenated, cholesterol-free, this shortening bakes up nice and light. See Resources, page 177, for brands that are manufactured in a peanut-free, tree nut-free facility. If the shortening is too solid to measure out easily, warm it in the microwave for about 15 seconds to soften it slightly. If it is too soft and soupy because it's a very warm day, chill the shortening in the refrigerator for 30 minutes, or until firmer. Also, be sure to pack and pack again when measuring, because it has a tendency to create air pockets. Really push it down into the measuring cup to make sure you're getting an exact measure.

1 cup dairy-free, soy-free vegetable shortening =
1 cup unsalted butter

Replacing Nuts and Nut Butters

The past few years have seen the advent of SunButter. SunButter (aka sunflower seed butter) is a great replacement for peanut butter and other nut butters. It is available at Trader Joe's, Whole

Foods, and many local health food stores. It's also popping up on some supermarket shelves. There is a small chance that containers of SunButter could be cross-contaminated with soy, which is also processed at that facility. To be extra careful, you can make your own sunflower seed butter using peanut-free sunflower seeds that you know to be safe. You can now buy “safe” sunflower seeds for snacking, or to use in baking, though you may have to order these online. See Resources, page 177, for peanut-free, tree nut-free brands.

Replacing Wheat Flour and Other Gluten Flours

This is perhaps the trickiest part of baking allergen-free. It's not so hard to bake gluten-free if you can still use eggs, butter, and nut flours, but figuring out how to bake without any of them has been a learning curve for me. But I persevered and am happy to report that I've come out triumphant. Baking allergen-free and gluten-free is not only possible, but it's also downright delicious!

GLUTEN-FREE, ALLERGEN-FREE FLOURS

Here's what you have to choose from: rice, corn, potato, tapioca, bean, garfava, sorghum, quinoa, millet, buckwheat, arrowroot, amaranth, teff, montina, and flax flours.

Whoa, that's a lot of flours! And trickier still, most of them can't be used on their own—they must be mixed like you're doing AP chemistry. They can't be swapped out cup for cup for wheat flour, and they require varying amounts of xanthan gum from recipe to recipe. So to make things simple for you, I've created a Basic Gluten-Free Flour Mix that you can whip up and store in your fridge.

Basic Gluten-Free Flour Mix

MAKES 6 CUPS

The key to the very best gluten-free baked goods is Authentic Foods superfine brown rice flour; it is the Cadillac, or cashmere, of brown rice flours and is worth its weight in gold. It is not grainy like other rice flours, and bakes the most fantastic cookies, cakes, pie crusts, and so on. If you can't find it at your local natural foods market or Whole Foods, order it online. Both Ener-G and Bob's Red Mill brown rice flours will also work in these recipes, but they won't turn out quite as well. I do not recommend Arrowhead Mills brown rice flour, which I find too gritty. The brands of potato starch and tapioca flour or starch are not important; I find them all interchangeable. (Please see Resources, page 177, for more information.)

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

1. To measure flour, use a large spoon to scoop flour into the measuring cup, then level it off with the back of a knife or straightedge. 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.
2. Combine all ingredients in a gallon-size zipper-top bag. Shake until well blended. Store in the refrigerator until ready to use.