

HEALTHY HOLIDAY BAKING

A Cornucopia of Delicious Treats



photos by Stephen Blancett

There's nothing so comforting as the scent and taste of home-baked treats. To fill a home with cheer, try these delectably healthy recipes. Some are gluten- or dairy-free, others pack less butter and sweeteners (thus fewer calories) than their typical counterparts, and a few are vegan (containing no animal products, including honey). All are perfect for holiday celebrations, hostess gifts or exchanges.

Gluten-Free Apricot Scones

These scones freeze well and taste even better the next day, warmed for 30 seconds in a microwave. Serve with apricot jam or honey.

Yields 8 servings
(342 calories per serving)

1½ cups brown rice flour
½ cup tapioca flour
⅓ cup potato starch
2½ tsp baking powder
2½ tsp xanthan gum
¼ cup natural cane sugar
½ tsp salt
½ cup (1 stick) cold butter, cubed
5 eggs (divided)
½ cup plus 1–2 Tbsp plain low-fat yogurt
¾ cups dried apricots, finely chopped
½ tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp almond extract

1 Tbsp water
¼ cup turbinado sugar

Preheat oven to 350° F. Sift together first 7 ingredients (brown rice flour through salt). Using a pastry blender or two knives, cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse meal.

In a separate bowl, whisk together 4 eggs, yogurt, apricots and extracts. Add to flour-butter mixture. Mix until just combined.

Dust work surface with brown rice flour. Turn out scone mixture and pat into a nine-by-nine-inch square. Cut scones into desired shape or use a biscuit cutter. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet.

Whisk remaining egg with 1 tablespoon water; brush mixture over scones. Sprinkle with turbinado sugar. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes or until golden.

Apple-Walnut Coffee Cake

Here's a favorite yummy treat for festive brunches. Guests and family will never guess that this decadent indulgence contains much less butter and sugar than a typical coffee cake.

Yields 16 servings
(239 calories per serving)

¼ cup light brown sugar
2 tsp ground cinnamon
2¼ cups whole-wheat pastry flour (divided)
¼ cup (½ stick) cold unsalted butter
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter at room temperature
1 cup maple sugar
2 eggs
¼ cup plus 1 Tbsp low-fat buttermilk (1 percent)
2 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp baking soda
½ tsp salt
2 cups Granny Smith apples, peeled and diced
½ cup walnuts, chopped and toasted

Preheat oven to 350° F. Line a 9-inch springform pan with parchment paper. Butter pan sides and top of parchment.

In a medium bowl, whisk together brown sugar, cinnamon and ¼ cup flour. Cut in ¼ cup cold butter until mixture becomes crumbly and resembles a streusel topping. Refrigerate until ready to use.

In a large bowl, use a mixer to cream together ½ cup room-temperature butter and maple sugar until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing until fully incorporated. Beat in buttermilk and vanilla. Sift remaining 2 cups flour, baking soda and salt into egg-butter mixture. Mix until just combined.

Fold in apples and walnuts. Pour batter into prepared pan and sprinkle with streusel topping. Bake for 50 to 55 minutes or until an inserted toothpick comes out clean. Cool before releasing from pan.

Vegan Trail-Mix Cookies

These crunchy-chewy cookies are perfect for snowshoe hikes or cross-country ski trips.

Yields 36 servings
(135 calories per serving)

¾ cup all-purpose flour
¾ cup whole-wheat pastry flour
1 cup carrot, shredded
1½ cups unsweetened coconut, shredded
1½ cups natural cane sugar
1½ cups rolled oats
1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
½ cup water
½ cup canola oil
1 Tbsp vanilla extract
1 cup grain-sweetened chocolate chips
1 cup chopped pecans, lightly toasted
1 cup cherries, dried

Preheat oven to 350° F. Mix together flours, carrot, coconut, sugar, oats, baking powder and salt. In a separate bowl, mix together water, oil and vanilla. Add wet mixture to dry. Mix to combine. Fold in chocolate chips, pecans and cherries.

Scoop batter by 2 tablespoons each onto a baking sheet, pushing in any stray pieces.



Bake for 15 to 20 minutes or until lightly golden. Cool for 2 minutes and then remove to a rack to cool completely.

Vegan Pumpkin Spice Muffins

These lightly sweetened, butter-free muffins evoke the scents and tastes of the holidays. With fewer carbs and calories than regular sugar, the concentrated fruit-juice reduction also adds moistness; look for all-natural options, such as Wax Orchards' Fruit Sweet.

Yields 16 servings
(145 calories per serving)

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup whole-wheat pastry flour
1 tsp baking soda
½ tsp salt
½ tsp ground nutmeg
1 tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp ground ginger
½ tsp ground allspice
1 cup pumpkin purée
⅔ cup fruit-juice reduction (or light agave nectar)
½ cup canola oil
¼ cup coconut milk
½ cup unsweetened coconut, shredded
1 cup walnuts, chopped and toasted
¾ cup dried cranberries

Preheat oven to 350° F. Line a 12-cup muffin tin with baking cups.

Sift together flours, baking soda, salt, nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger and allspice in a bowl. In a separate bowl, mix together pumpkin purée, fruit-juice reduction or agave, oil and coconut milk. Stir wet mixture into dry until just incorporated (do not overmix). Fold in coconut, walnuts and dried cranberries.

Divide batter evenly among muffin tins. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until an inserted toothpick comes out clean.

Healthy Red Velvet Cupcakes

These moist cupcakes use spelt flour for a lighter texture, more protein and fewer calories than wheat flour. Avoid artificial colors by using vegetable-based food coloring, or make your own.

Yields 8 to 10 servings
(352 calories per serving)

Cupcakes

1½ cups white spelt flour
1 tsp baking powder
¼ tsp salt
1 Tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder
(not Dutch-processed)
½ cup natural cane sugar
½ cup melted coconut oil (or safflower oil)
2 eggs at room temperature
¾ cup buttermilk at room temperature
2 tsp vanilla extract
2 tsp lemon juice
3 tsp natural red food coloring



Agave Cream-Cheese Frosting

8 oz Neufchâtel (reduced-fat) cream cheese at room temperature
3 Tbsp plus 1 tsp agave nectar
1 tsp vanilla extract
2 tsp cornstarch

Preheat oven to 350° F. Line a muffin tin with 8 to 10 cupcake liners or coat with cooking spray.

Place flour, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl. Sift cocoa powder into the bowl. Whisk until well blended.

Place sugar, oil and eggs in a separate large bowl. Whisk until smooth. Add buttermilk, vanilla, lemon juice and food coloring. Whisk lightly until combined.

Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients and stir just until mixture comes together. Do not overmix.

Gently spoon batter into muffin cups. Bake 10 minutes and test with a toothpick. If it doesn't come out clean, turn pans and bake another 3 to 5 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool on rack for 2 minutes. Remove from pan and cool completely before frosting. (Or store in an airtight container until ready to frost. Do not refrigerate, which dries them out.)

Beat cream cheese, agave and vanilla together. Sift cornstarch over mixture and blend until smooth. Frost cupcakes just before serving.